

Golden Sun : My Continuation

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***Chapter 1*: The Kraken**

My first fic. It takes place after our heroes sail away in search of Lemuria. Please R+ R!

Disclaimer: I don't own Golden Sun. Obviously. Just my character Videll.

It was early morning on the ocean, nearly a month after the lighting of the Venus lighthouse beacon, and the only living thing to be seen was Isaac. He sat alone on the deck of the Lemurian ship, thinking about the storm in Vale three years ago. *I wonder - what if I had trained harder before that night? Would things have been different? And my father...*

"You don't have to keep obsessing over that," said a quiet voice off to his right. "There was nothing you could do." Isaac looked up into a pair of startling violet eyes. "Ivan - when did you wake up?"

"Long before you," added a deeper voice behind him. Isaac turned to see his other two friends and fellow Adepts - Gareth and Mia - standing side by side in front of the cabin doors.

"What have you been doing out here?" asked Mia, looking worried. "You were so zoned out, you couldn't even tell Ivan was reading your mind!"

Isaac was silent for a long moment. "Just... thinking," he said finally.

"Well, you've thought long enough," Gareth chided. "Let's eat!" His three friends rolled their eyes.

"Trust Gareth to think of his stomach," laughed Isaac, put out of his gloomy mood. "It would be nice to eat, though."

The four friends walked into the cabin and down the stairs to where they ate, all looking happy and refreshed - except Ivan, who looked worried. After breakfast, they set out once more. But as they sailed, they were moving closer and closer to the danger that would put their mission - and even their lives - in jeopardy.

On a small island not far from where Isaac and his friends were sailing, a young girl paced, her long, dark purple hair shifting in the breeze, her violet eyes troubled. She knew what was in store for Isaac and company. But she couldn't warn them! Her power to see the future was a great gift, but at 15, her powers had not yet developed enough to actually communicate with the ones she saw.

All I can do is wait, she decided. I'll be ready to help when the time comes.

There were others besides this girl who were troubled. Back on the ship, Ivan sat restless, uneasy. *Something's coming*, he thought. *Something very bad is coming.*

"What's wrong, Ivan?" Mia's voice broke through his thoughts. "You've been acting strange all day. It's not like you." Ivan was silent. Mia brushed a gleaming strand of her bright blue hair back from her face, patiently waiting for an answer. Finally Ivan told her what had been troubling him.

"I don't know why I know these things," he finished. "But I know something bad is going to happen." Mia had the answer right away.

"Remember master Hama, Ivan?" She inquired. Ivan nodded - how could he forget? "Well, before master Hama taught you reveal," Mia continued, "she told us that you had the power to see the future, even though you didn't know it yet."

Ivan's eyes widened. "That worries me even more!" he told her. "We'd better get ready for battle. Can you warn the others? I have to get my Djinn set up."

But it was too late to prepare. As Mia hurried toward Isaac and Garet, a huge shadow fell over the ship.

The girl stopped her pacing and faced the water, her eyes wide, staring out to sea.

This is it, she thought. The kraken has arrived.

Just as Mia reached the other two boys, the shadow fell. All four Adepts slowly lifted their gaze up, up, and up further still. The giant kraken glared down at them for a moment, then lifted its tentacles up toward the sky, summoning a tremendous water funnel that steadily moved toward the ship, cutting through the water more quickly than the ship could move away. Then it let out an enraged battle cry, and began to lash wildly at the Adepts with a tentacle twice as long as the ship's mast. Isaac and Mia quickly ducked behind a pile of crates on the deck, pulling the slower Garet

with them, the blow missing its target by inches. Ivan, however, had nowhere to run.

The last thing the three heard before the kraken's funnel took them was Ivan's scream as tentacle hit flesh, the last thing they saw before the world went black the red of blood in the funnel as it claimed Ivan as well.

***** What do you think so far?

Please review!

***Chapter 2*: Videll**

Next chapter! R+ R!

Disclaimer: Don't own Golden Sun, just Videll.

Here they come, she thought grimly as the water funnel approached the island. She knew from what she had seen of the future that Ivan would be badly hurt, and she squinted up at the funnel to see if she could spot him. And good thing she looked up, because just then a piece of the ship's wrecked mast was hurled from the top of the funnel to come crashing down on her. She spotted it just in time to jump out of the way, but she lost sight of Ivan. Quickly she looked up again, but the four Adepts were already sailing over her head. She was glad to see their Psyenergy surrounding and protecting them as they disappeared into the forest at her back.

Quickly she set off into the woods, looking for any sign of the Adepts. After a few minutes she heard a groan off to her left. She broke through the bushes and immediately spotted Ivan lying limp on the forest floor, his clothes stained with blood and his face tight with pain.

"Ivan!" she cried urgently as she ran to him. "Ivan, can you hear me?" She was glad to hear his soft "Wh-who are you?" despite the fact that it was barely audible, even in the silence of the forest. Without giving an answer, she knelt and examined Ivan.

His bloodstained shirt was ripped apart, revealing a deep gash running from his left shoulder to his right hip. A quick look confirmed that it had missed anything vital. Closing her eyes, she laid her palms flat on Ivan's damp, sticky chest and concentrated with all her might on her most powerful healing Psyenergy, Blessed Wind. She winced when she saw the result - the wound had been worse than she thought. Usually Blessed Wind resulted in full recovery. Only the worst wounds merely scabbed over, as Ivan's had. She began to tear strips from her cloak, using them as makeshift gauze and bandages. If only she had her healing herbs with her! She hated applying untreated bandages to a wound - she much preferred a proper dressing.

Ivan's voice came again - stronger now, but still frightened: "Who are you? What happened?"

"My name is Videll," she replied, not stopping her work. Only when Ivan was bandaged to her satisfaction did she look at his face. His eyes were wide with fright and pain, and the very sight of him softened her tense mood. "You should rest," she told him, her voice softening. Wanting to comfort him, she positioned herself near his resting place, making it clear that he would be safe while he slept. She watched him until he drifted off to sleep.

Isaac slowly opened his eyes. It was dark, and he was surprised to see treetops above his head. A forest? *What about the ocean? And the ship* - Then he remembered the kraken. He quickly sat up and looked around. It was very dark, as the trees and vegetation were relatively thick, blocking even moonlight. Nevertheless, he could see Mia lying in the bushes to his right, covered with scratches from the thorns. Seeing her cuts, Isaac quickly examined himself

for injuries. There were none, apart from several bruises on his arms and back. He turned back to Mia and used Revive. She sat up and blinked, then realized Isaac was next to her.

"Where are we?" she asked in a trembling voice. "What happened to the kraken?"

"I haven't the slightest idea," he told her as he looked around for the others. He soon spotted Gareth lying under a tree not far off. He ran over to him and revived him as well. Gareth sat up and took a quick look around.

"Where's Ivan?" he asked. Isaac and Mia looked around too - there was no sign of Ivan anywhere.

"I hope his Psyenergy protected him like it did for us," Mia said quietly, gazing off into the woods. Suddenly she turned, a determined look in her blue eyes. "We have to find him!" she said.

Though the three searched long hours, they found no trace of Ivan, and finally, exhausted, they dropped to the ground in a deep, dreamless sleep.

Ivan slept all afternoon and through the night, waking late the next morning. Videll was sitting by a fire to his left, her back turned to him. He also noticed that the forest floor had been cleared of leaves and branches, and a tent had been set up to his right. All of a sudden the worry hit him. Where were Isaac and the others? He tried to sit up, but a sharp pain streaked across his wound, and he fell back to the ground.

Videll, hearing the noise, turned, looking worried. "No, Ivan," she scolded as she came to sit by him. "Don't sit up. Don't

push yourself too hard. Isaac and the others will be fine. They were not hurt by the kraken, and their Psyenergy probably cushioned their fall."

"How did you know what I was thinking?" Ivan asked, startled. "You couldn't be..."

"Yes, Ivan," Videll replied, smiling. "I am a Jupiter Adept, just like you."

"So that means... you must have seen the kraken in the future, right?" he questioned.

"Yes," she replied, "and that is how I knew you were hurt. You are in no condition to go looking for your friends," she added, "and if I leave you, some creature or other will have a very good breakfast. Several have already tried." This drew an involuntary shudder from Ivan. "We will look for your friends when your wounds have healed enough," Videll promised. "But chances are they will find us first."

Satisfied by this, Ivan lay back down. He was asleep within minutes.

When the other three Adepts awoke, it was dark again. This time they spotted a flickering light through the bushes to their right. Cautiously, they crept over and peered through the thick vegetation. The first thing they saw was Ivan lying asleep on the ground. The three exchanged glances, unsure of what to do. Gareth was the first to muster his courage and step through the bushes and into the clearing.

Before he reached Ivan, he heard a voice on his right: "Shh! Don't wake him." All three turned toward the voice, Isaac and Mia stepping out of the bushes as they did. They saw a

young violet-haired girl about Ivan's age sitting by a fire. She had them fixed with her steady gaze, seeming to look straight into their hearts.

"Who are you?" Isaac asked cautiously.

"I am Videll," she replied, "a Jupiter Adept."

"How did you find Ivan?" Mia asked her.

"Come and sit down," Videll said, beckoning, "and I'll tell you everything." Videll explained about herself, her powers, and how she found Ivan. Hearing his name spoken, Ivan's eyes opened. He was now able to rise onto his elbows as his friends rushed over to him, glad to see him awake.

"Are you all right?" Mia fussed.

"What happened to you?" Isaac asked.

"I don't know what all the fuss is about," Gareth scoffed. "He's obviously fine." But his eyes gave away his concern, and Ivan knew he felt the same as his other two friends.

After everyone had heard the story from Ivan's point of view, Videll chipping in during the parts where Ivan was unconscious or asleep, they began to discuss what they would do once Ivan was better. Noticing that Gareth had been quiet, unusual for him, Mia asked him what was on his mind.

"Well," Gareth faltered, "I mean, I was thinkin'..."

"Thinking what?" Videll asked, speaking for the first time since Ivan's story.

"Well, I was wondering if... if maybe... you wanted to come with us, Videll. We could use someone like you to help get

the Elemental Stars back."

A smile lit up Videll's face. "Sure," she told him, "I'd be glad to help you four on your quest." She paused for a moment. "But right now there's one major problem."

"What is it?" the four asked in unison.

"Well, I guess I'll start from the beginning. A few weeks ago I was testing out an amulet I'd found - a teleportation amulet. But the spell was interrupted by the magical barrier around this island, and I was left here."

"You mean a Psyenergy barrier?" Gareth asked. "Then maybe..."

Videll looked at Gareth for a moment, then shook her head. "No, Gareth, this isn't Lemuria. I've been all over the island, and there's no civilization anywhere." Gareth looked puzzled. Videll smiled a little. "I did tell you I was a Jupiter Adept!" she reminded him. "Anyway, that's why I'm here. I would have tried harder to get off the island, but then I had a vision about the kraken. I knew you would need help, especially Ivan here," she said, smiling at him. To everyone's surprise, Ivan blushed.

Videll seemed not to notice. "So, we can't get off the island. The amulet was destroyed in passing through the barrier." Then a thought hit her. "But you four got through... maybe the kraken's water funnel disrupted the barrier!"

"If that was true," Ivan said slowly, "We would need to find the place where the funnel met the barrier."

"Oh, that's no problem," Videll assured him. "I know this island forward and backward. The real problem is what we'll use to sail out. "We'll need something better than a raft to

find Lemuria, even just to get back to the mainland to stock up on food."

"I'm stumped," admitted Gareth. "What do you think, Ivan? ...Ivan?"

Looking over at him, the other four Adepts saw Ivan was asleep. "We'd better let him rest," Videll suggested. "He needs it. That kraken beat him up pretty badly. We can plan more in the morning."

After everyone woke up the next morning, they planned some more and decided to send Isaac and Mia out to see what driftwood they could salvage from the ship, while Gareth and Videll stayed to protect Ivan. After a half hour or so, the two scouts returned.

"It's a miracle!" Mia cried as she ran breathless into the clearing, her eyes shining.

Isaac came up behind her. "The ship is hardly damaged at all," he told them excitedly. "If we really work at it, we could have it good as new in a few days!"

Everyone was excited by this. As soon as Ivan was better, they set to work. The main body of the ship was mostly undamaged. Mia's water Djinn worked on the rudder, as it was submerged in the water. Mia worked on getting the water out of the inside of the ship, belowdecks and such, as she could control the water with her Psyenergy. Gareth and Isaac repaired several holes in the walls of the ship, as they were the strongest physically. At first, the mast was a real problem. It was much too high for any of them to reach without the right equipment. All their efforts seemed wasted, but then Ivan and Videll found they could summon

up strong pillars of wind to hold them in the air, and use air currents to move wood up and down from where they sat. With all the Adepts working hard, the ship was repaired within a week.

Then the Adepts collected food. The scarce fruit and meat on the island would not be enough to sustain them for a long journey. The five agreed that it might not even be enough to get them back to the mainland.

"We'll just have to use our food sparingly," declared Isaac. "If we eat small meals, it should last us until we get back to land and can restock." Garet, of course, grumbled at this, but everyone agreed it was the best thing to do.

The next day, the five Adepts boarded the ship and started their quest anew.

***** more coming! please r+ r!

***Chapter 3*: Shared Power**

Next chapter! I might not post new chapters very quickly, I have two health projects due.

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Disclaimer(ugh): I don't own Golden Sun, just Videll.

It was a cold, windy day. Garet, Isaac, and Mia were huddled inside the cabin of the Lemurian ship, wrapped in several layers of clothing. Ivan and Videll were sitting out on deck, right at home in the chill wind. In fact, they both seemed to be enjoying it, much to Garet's annoyance.

"Trust a Jupiter Adept to sit around in the freezing wind," he grumbled to himself. He then resumed his eavesdropping.

"It's so nice out today," Videll commented. "As far as I'm concerned, every day ought to be like this.

"I don't think the others feel that way," said Ivan, a tiny smile on his lips. The two looked toward the cabin, and their bundled-up friends.

Suddenly a troubled look came over Videll's face. "What's the matter?" Ivan inquired. "Do you see something in the future?"

"No," Videll said, smiling a little. "I'm just picking up Garet's thoughts." Her voice dropped to a whisper. "He's eavesdropping," she informed Ivan.

"Let him," Ivan sighed. "There's no stopping him once he's decided to. The two Adepts were quiet for a moment, letting the wind fill their minds. Ivan broke the silence.

"Sometimes I wish I could see the future like you," he told his companion, a wistful look filling his violet eyes.

Videll considered this a moment before responding. "There might be a way..." she said slowly. She smiled when she saw Ivan's face light up. "I might be able to pass on my power to you, like Master Hama did," she explained. "I've done it before."

Ivan was speechless. "Really?" he asked her, hope in his eyes. "You really wouldn't mind?"

Videll smiled at him. "Of course not, silly," she teased. "Why would I mind?"

She was cut off by the opening of the cabin door. Gareth stepped out, clad in at least three different shirts, a thick cloak, a hat, and a scarf. Both Adepts had to hide their smiles. It would not be pleasant if the Mars Adept, most affected by the cold weather, caught them laughing at him.

"I have to see this," he announced.

"See what?" asked Mia curiously. She and Isaac came out of the door behind Gareth. Mia had only donned her heavy cloak, as she was used to Imil's cold weather. Isaac, however, was dressed similarly to Gareth, not liking the wind at all.

"Videll is going to teach Ivan how to see the future," Gareth explained.

"Oh, like Master Hama showed him Reveal?" Isaac asked, taking a seat on the deck. "I want to see too!"

"What's so special about that?" Mia asked him.

"Don't you remember last time?" Gareth asked incredulously.
"That was one neat levitation show!"

Isaac and Mia rolled their eyes. "I just want to see what it'll look like," Isaac said, looking impatiently at the two Jupiter Adepts. "So? You gonna do it or not?"

Mia sighed and plopped down next to Isaac as the two Adepts faced each other. Videll took Ivan's hands firmly in her own. He felt heat rising to his face at the touch.

What's wrong with me? he thought to himself. *I don't like her, do I?* Videll's gentle voice broke through his thoughts.

"Now close your eyes..."

The other three watched as the Jupiter Adepts, eyes closed, rose slowly off the ground. The three could sense the Psyenergy flowing between the two as they rose higher and higher, glowing gently violet. Suddenly, with a flash of blinding lavender light, the two Adepts became one, head lifted, palms facing the sky...

And then they were Ivan and Videll again, floating slowly back down to the ship, hands still tightly joined. They landed with a bump, their eyes flickering open. To their surprise, the others were applauding them.

"That was awesome!" they exclaimed in unison.

"What did it look like?" Videll inquired. But before the others could answer, she let out a cry of surprise.

"What is it?" Ivan asked, looking concerned.

"Ivan," she stammered, looking genuinely confused, "Ivan, I - I can tell what you're thinking!"

"Of course you can," said Gareth, sounding annoyed, "you can read minds!"

Videll shook her head. "No," she explained, regaining her composure somewhat, "I wasn't mind reading him. It just - came," she finished, not able to find the right word to describe the feeling.

Now Ivan was looking confused. "I can see your thoughts too," he told Videll quietly. "They're just - there when I look at you."

"Maybe when Videll passed power to Ivan, it created a sort of mental connection," Isaac guessed.

"That kind of thing could be useful in battle," Gareth said, looking excited. "Maybe if we shared power too..."

Mia shook her head. "That won't work, Gareth," she told him. "Remember, those two are the same element." She gestured at Ivan and Videll as she explained. "So were Master Hama and Ivan before, with Reveal. None of us are the same element, so I'm guessing we can't share power that way."

Gareth looked disappointed. "That's no fair," he muttered to himself.

"You can't have every power everyone else does, Gareth!" she scolded him. "We should be thankful Ivan and Videll can do it!"

By now, though, Gareth had lost interest. He quickly changed the subject. "Isn't it time for lunch yet?" he asked.

Everyone laughed, but agreed it was indeed time for lunch. The Adepts filed inside for lunch, Ivan pausing a moment to feel the wind in his hair before he entered the warmth of the cabin.

***** I'm apologizing in advance for all the Jupiter-related stuff in this fic - I'm sure you can tell by now it's my favorite element! More soon... hopefully...

***Chapter 4*: Land ho!**

...nothing much to say, 'cept I don't own Golden Sun.

Isaac woke up to the sound of two loud, arguing voices. He knew right away one would be Gareth's - he didn't believe it was humanly possible for Gareth to witness an argument and not take part.

"Why can't you just eat the same amount as everyone else does?" That was Mia. Isaac felt sorry for his friend - Mia was quite scary when she got mad. "You always have to have an exception made when it comes to food!"

With a groan, Isaac pulled himself out of bed, making his way toward the door and the sound of the voices. He opened the cabin door to find Gareth and Mia facing off in a shouting match. Ivan and Videll were seated on the side of the deck, right where the wind was strongest. They seemed to be using the argument as a source of entertainment.

"Why do you always have to complain about it?" countered Gareth. "We've been doing fine with me taking a little extra food-"

"A little extra?" fumed Mia, turning beet red with anger. "Is that what you call an extra meal every day? If I wasn't stuck with you for the rest of this trip I'd..."

"Oh, hi, Isaac," Videll called over the shouts of their companions. "Care to join in the fun? It's just getting to the part where Mia starts shooting ice crystals at him..."

Isaac walked over to the two Jupiter Adepts, picking a seat out of the wind. Videll glanced at Ivan, who had turned his gaze out ahead of the ship.

"What? Land already?" Ever since Videll and Ivan had shared their Psyenergy, they could see each other's thoughts as easily as they could see each other's faces. Ivan nodded as he turned back to his friends.

"I think so. I can make out something that looks like the Venus Lighthouse." His two companions turned, but couldn't see a thing. Ivan had much better eyesight than the rest of them.

Videll cleared her throat. "Guys?" Her voice was lost in Gareth and Mia's shouting match. "GUYS!" Finally they stopped their mindless yelling and turned to look at her. "There's really no need to be arguing," she said mildly. "Ivan found land."

Garet dropped his fighting stance to plop down onto the deck. "Finally, a decent meal!" he said, his mind already on the food and soft, warm beds of an inn.

"You know we'll have to sleep outside at least once before we reach Lalivero," Ivan reminded him, his voice quiet as always.

This dampened Gareth's mood as quickly as it had brightened it. He fell back onto the deck with a sigh. "Why do you always have to be so practical, Ivan?" he muttered.

"To keep you from going crazy," Ivan retorted. "You'd better turn the ship a little, Isaac," he said. "We're drifting a little."

"Alright." Isaac pulled the Black Orb from his pocket, and concentrated. The ship began to turn. After a few minutes they were safely docked.

"What are you waiting for?" Gareth shouted back at them as he hopped off the boat. "I want some decent food!" He began running off along the road. The other four Adepts sighed, and hurried to catch up with their ever-hungry companion.

***Chapter 5*: Shared Pain**

I DON'T own Golden Sun. Ugh how many times do I have to say this?!

"Ugghhh..." The five Adepts had been traveling for nearly three hours, and Gareth had lost most of his former enthusiasm.

"Aw, come on, Gareth," said Videll cheerfully. We're halfway there already!" Gareth just looked at her.

"Don't you feel so much better, Gareth?" Ivan said wickedly. Gareth glared at both of them - he didn't have enough energy to pound them into the ground, his first reaction.

"How can you two not be tired?" Isaac groaned. Ivan and Videll were currently at the head of the group, maintaining a brisk trot, even after all this time. The other three were struggling along in the back, finding it difficult even to move. "I was energetic next to the Venus Lighthouse, but this is ridiculous!"

"It's windy," replied Ivan simply, as if that explained everything. Gareth started to say something, but stopped when he saw an enemy approaching.

"Whose turn is it?" he asked wearily.

"Mine," replied Mia. She stepped up and flicked her finger at the single bat, sending a small spray of water at it. It was instantly defeated.

"Jeez," mumbled Isaac, "these monsters-"

"I don't know if you can even call them monsters," Gareth interrupted. He was currently seated on the path, taking this opportunity to rest his tired legs.

"-are even weaker than the ones we battled in Vale," he finished with a glare at Gareth. Isaac did not like being interrupted.

"Maybe," came Mia's frightened voice, "but those sure aren't!"

The other four turned to see two Earth Golems and a Fenrir standing before them. The Fenrir snarled its challenge, making it clear that it did not intend to let the five travelers make it to Lalivero. The Golems just stared eerily at them.

"Mia and Gareth, take the left Golem!" Isaac shouted as the party assumed battle positions. "Ivan and Videll, you take the one on the right - combine your attacks! I think I can handle the Fenrir alone."

The four assumed their assigned positions, Gareth mumbling something about "overconfident leaders". The Fenrir's party let out a battle cry and leapt at the Adepts.

The five friends had been battling for a few minutes, and they were starting to gain the advantage. Mia and Gareth were doing very well, using Gareth as the primary fighter and Mia as the healer. Gareth shot a branch of flame straight at the Golem, blinding it. In its blind thrashing, though, it hit Gareth directly, throwing him back several feet. Mia was ready. She concentrated a blast of Psyenergy into her palm and shot a sheet of ice straight at the Golem. It let out a cry

of pain, wildly trying to fend off the attacker it could not see. Mia took this opportunity to cast a pure ply, fully healing Gareth.

Isaac lunged at the Fenrir with his Gaia Blade, intending to disable one of its legs - those claws were a major problem. But the Fenrir was fast - faster than Isaac had expected. It dodged the blow, sending him off balance. He lifted his Gaia Blade just as the Fenrir pounced, keeping its snapping jaws at bay. They tumbled over and over across the grass. As they slowed, Isaac saw his chance. He pulled his knees up to his chest and kicked-

Ivan and Videll were handling their Golem with ease. Their speed and ability to combine attacks were too much for the Golem. It swung sharp claws toward the two Adepts continually, but their speed far outmatched its own. This time they flipped over its claws, as easily as if they did it every day. They landed side by side and joined hands, communicating and planning by thought. They raised their hands towards the sky. "Shine Plasma!!!" The sky's wrath poured down onto the Golem in a barrage of storm bolts, knocking it to the ground.

The Golem seemed to be defeated, but it had been smart. Coming out of its dead act, it lunged at the two Jupiter Adepts, catching them off guard. Videll dove to the side, managing to escape, but Ivan was caught across the chest by the claws. Before he could even cry out, he was thrown against the large boulders to one side of the path. Here was something they had not taken into consideration. The rocks trapped Ivan, cutting off any possible escape.

Videll knew what she had to do. Any Psyenergetic attack she projected would not reach the Golem in time. As the monster prepared to swing, she called on a power deep within her...

Ivan shut his eyes, bracing himself for the fatal blow. It never came. He opened his eyes to find a bubble of violet light encircling him. The Golem looked stunned - obviously it wasn't that smart. As the Golem hesitated, Ivan saw Videll sinking to her knees...

Pain flooded her. It was too much. She couldn't keep her hold on the spell. She saw the shield flicker away as she hit the ground. She was vaguely aware of Ivan through the haze of pain, cornered and vulnerable to the blow that would end his life... "No," she whispered. "I won't give up now..."

With the last of her strength, she forced the barrier up again, stopping the Golem's claws inches from Ivan's throat. "Ivan! Get out of there!" she yelled. Snapping out of his trance, he obliged, diving through the Golem's legs while it was still off balance from the attack. Recovering quickly, he turned and sprang onto the thing's back and jumped high above it. With a quick twist, he plummeted back down toward the Golem, his feet skyward and his Zodiac Wand pointing toward the enemy. His aim held true. A sickening crack was heard as the Golem's spine (or whatever it had in there) snapped. Their enemy defeated, the two friends collapsed against each other, too tired to stand.

Garet lunged, forcing the Swift Sword through the Golem. At the same time, Isaac launched Mother Gaia at the Fenrir, finishing it. The party sized up their wounds. Isaac had a few bites and scratches from his tussle with the Fenrir, which Mia set to work on right away. After managing to stand, Ivan nearly fainted when he felt the blood that had soaked his shirt through.

"Garet," Videll called weakly. He came over to where she sat. "Could you get Corona set up? I need to recover my Psyenergy."

Garet nodded. The Djinni materialized on his shoulder, then jumped into the air, surrounding Videll with restoring flames. As soon as that was done, she turned to Ivan and cast Blessed Wind. The cuts vanished instantly.

"I'm getting better," Videll commented with a weak smile.

"Wow," came an awed voice. Mia had finished healing Isaac and was looking at Videll with admiration. "I've seen that technique used before! It's the only shield powerful enough to stop monsters this strong."

"What was that, anyway?" Ivan asked. "And why did it hurt you to cast it?"

Videll shook her head. "You explain, Mia."

"Well," Mia continued, "it's the only shield that can block monsters of this level. The Great Healer back in Imil told me about it. A few chosen Adepts were taught the technique thousands of years ago. It was passed down through their families, and the ancestors of those Adepts can now use it. It-"

"Enough about old people," Garet broke in. "Why did it hurt her to use it?"

Mia glared at him. Seeing an argument about to start, Videll quickly picked up the explanation. "The shield is so strong, it has to have a downside to balance the power," she explained. "The Adept who casts the shield feels the pain that the blow would have caused."

"Videll, you could have killed yourself with that!" cried Ivan, alarmed. "You shouldn't have-"

"Yes, I should have," she told him firmly. "That thing would have killed you. While the user feels the pain, it does no actual damage. What it would have done to you was much, much worse."

Isaac shook his head. "Any other things you can do that we had no idea about?" he asked, grinning. "You do something unexpected every day!"

"That's it," she replied, grinning as well. "I didn't think I'd ever need a shield that strong. I hadn't used it in years."

"Well, let's go," Gareth said, completely off topic. He was already continuing down the road.

There was a collective groan from the rest of the group. "In case you haven't noticed, Gareth, some of us are *tired*," Ivan informed him. Gareth looked back. No one showed any signs of moving. They simply sat against the rocks, looking at him expectantly.

With an exaggerated sigh, Gareth trudged back to his friends. Smiling at their victory over Gareth, they began to tiredly set up camp. When the exhausted travelers finally finished, it was dark, and they fell asleep immediately.

Sorry for the short chapter. I needed to introduce the shield, and this was the latest place I could cut off. I'm going to start using my secondary genre in the next chapter. ^ _ ^

***Chapter 6*: Guiding Winds**

IIIIIIII doooon't oooooown goooooolden suuuuuun.

Time for some mushy stuff! I bet you'll have a real hard time guessing the couple! ^.^

The wind blew strongly where the Adepts were camped that night. Videll could feel it pulling at her spirit, willing her to leave the earth she was bound to and soar through the sky. But this wasn't the only reason she was not asleep. His face filled her mind. She could see clearly his lovely violet eyes and gentle features, feel his soft blonde hair against her palm. As their friendship grew, so had her affection, no, her desire for him.

He was hiding something. Lately when she ventured into his mind, she was met with a wall of pure emotion. She sent up a prayer that her own feelings had been hidden as well. She didn't know what she would do if he found out.

She sighed and turned over in her bedding. She would never fall asleep this way. The wind still called to her. Silently she left her bed, heat rising from the abandoned bedroll. Then she crept catlike through their camp and into the woods.

Ivan stood with his face to the sky, letting the wind calm his soul. He had been kept awake with thoughts of her, the angel in his dreams. He wondered where she was now, what she was doing, how she was wearing her silken hair. As if the wind sensed his thoughts, it began to pull and tug at his

clothes, nudging him deeper into the woods. He let it guide him and fell back into his mind.

She finally stopped walking and let the wind take her over. This time she gave into the feeling and left the ground with the wind. It seemed to know where it wanted to take her, and she let it, eyes closed, hovering a foot above the ground as it pulled her through the trees.

She was deep in thought when the wind released her, lowering her gently to the ground. She opened her eyes and found she was looking straight into Ivan's. They both gasped in surprise before they regained their composure. Ivan broke the silence.

"How did you get here, Videll?" he asked. He spoke her name delicately, as if it might break on his tongue.

"The wind brought me," she replied. She knew he would know what she meant. The wind swirled around them, nudging them closer together. She looked into his gorgeous indigo eyes and thought she might faint.

"Thank you... for saving me back there," he said, looking down. She noticed he was blushing slightly. She knew by the heat in her cheeks that she was, too.

"It was no problem," she told him. "I couldn't just let you die like that..." She looked straight into his eyes. "I'd never let you die," she whispered.

He moved closer to her. "Videll... I..."

And then she could see. The barrier in his mind was gone. She could see the nights spent thinking about her, the longing gazes when her back was turned. She knew from the look on Ivan's face that he could see her feelings too.

The wind pushed them together, and they didn't resist. Their lips met hesitantly as their arms intertwined, and they gave in to their emotions. They pulled even closer, and the kiss deepened until nothing in the world mattered but their bodies pressed against each other, and the taste of the other's lips...

They broke apart, breathless, and immediately went back for more. When they were finally satisfied, they were content just to gaze into each other's eyes, enjoying the sight of true love.

The sun peeking through the trees brought them out of their romantic thoughts. With a last kiss, they began to go their separate ways back toward the campsite.

Videll stopped Ivan before they parted. "I love you," she whispered, for the first time knowing exactly what those words meant. As he walked away, she heard his voice carrying over the wind.

"I love you too."

***Chapter 7*: Kidnap**

Like someone like me would own Golden Sun... anyway...

Uh... read I guess. I'm kinda sleepy so don't kill me if this part sucks. ^-^

Videll woke up to the sound of her friends talking outside. She frowned as she rose from her bed. Something didn't sound right... Lifting the flap of her tent, she glanced at her friends and saw what was wrong - no Ivan.

Mia was the first to notice her. "Hi, Videll," she greeted. "You seen Ivan?"

"I was about to ask you that," she replied. She seemed calm, but inside she was panicking. He was usually the first of them up. Thoughts jumbled inside of her head as her sleepy brain tried to make sense of the situation. "Did you check his tent?"

Isaac nodded. "He's not there. The bed's been slept in, though." At hearing this, Videll went to examine the tent for herself.

"Maybe he just went for a walk," suggested Mia. "It doesn't seem like something he would do, but..."

Videll shook her head as she emerged from the tent. "His Zodiac Wand is still in there," she told them quietly. "He wouldn't go anywhere alone without it."

"I still say he went for a walk," declared Gareth stubbornly. "He probably just forgot the wand."

"Gareth, you know he wouldn't forget-" Videll cut off in mid sentence, her eyes wide. "Oh, no. No, no, no."

"What is it?" asked Isaac, looking panicked himself. "What is it???"

Videll sank onto a stone, the cold surface raising goosebumps on her legs. "Felix and Alex must still be trying to light the lighthouses."

"I doubt it... we don't even know if Felix survived the fall. But what would that have to do with Ivan?" Gareth asked.

"Jupiter Lighthouse is the last lighthouse they can light," she continued, sounding as if every word pained her. Seeing that her friends still didn't understand, she decided to get right to the point. "You need a Jupiter Adept to get into Jupiter lighthouse. Take Ivan away, and you can't follow them up there."

"But we have you!" Gareth protested. "We *can* still get in!"

Videll was silent, sitting with her head in her hands. "They don't know about Videll," Mia said, dread in her face. "They must have taken Ivan."

"But how would they get Ivan out of his tent without a fight?" Isaac pondered. Videll knew, but she wasn't ready to tell them about last night...

"I heard him get out of his tent at night," she lied. "He couldn't sleep - I saw it in his mind." It was close to the truth. She had just left out the fact that she was there with him.

"He must have gone for a walk, and they grabbed him," Garet concluded. "But how can we find him?" he moaned. "They could be anywhere between here and Jupiter Lighthouse - they might not even be headed toward it yet - they could have left him somewhere out in the woods-"

Videll? Videll, can you hear me? Videll's eyes shot wide open. The others fell silent when they saw the eerie shade of purple her eyes were glowing.

Videll concentrated her thoughts on Ivan and sent a message into her mind. *Ivan? Ivan, is that you?! Where are you? Did they hurt you? What-*

Calm down. Ivan's mental voice sounded calm and controlled, but Videll knew him too well. She could tell he was scared to death. They have me with them. They're headed toward Jupiter Lighthouse, I think. I overheard them talking about it. We've been walking a while now - we might be a quarter of the way there. I can't tell for sure, because - they have me blindfolded.

For a split second, Videll could feel tight bandages cutting into her wrists and ankles, feel rough cloth over her eyes and mouth - and bruises all over her body. She shivered, on the verge of tears. *They *have* hurt you! Ivan, you - what are they going to do with you once they get inside the lighthouse?!*

Ivan's reply was shaky. I- I don't know. A hint of desperation showed in his voice. Videll, what if- Suddenly pain blossomed in her side, and she felt her connection with Ivan fade.

Ivan? Ivan?! IVAN!!! Suddenly she was pulled back to reality. Slowly, she became aware of her friends, shaking her and calling her name. She brushed them away shakily. The

pain in her side was gone, and she knew now that it must have been Ivan's.

"They have him," she said, all hope gone from her voice. "They're headed toward the lighthouse. They're hurting him..."

"We have to find them!" Isaac said, showing how determined he truly was. Videll could see the others thought the task near impossible, but they suggested plans anyway. The four Adepts didn't know how they could save their friend, but they knew they had to.

Videll: You're so mean! If it weren't for you, they wouldn't have Ivan! (anime waterfall tears)

If it weren't for me, Videll, you wouldn't exist.

Videll: Oh. Good point.

Ahem On with the fic!

Ivan stumbled along in the dark, guided only by the rough shoves of whoever was walking behind him. His side still hurt where Alex had kicked him, and he could not contain a cry of pain as rough hands met his tender skin.

"Quiet, you!" came a cold voice behind him, and the next thing he knew he was in the dirt, the rocks on the forest floor cutting into his face and hands. The sound of laughter rang all around him, and he wished he could disappear, be back with his friends and on his way to Lalivero once more.

Slowly he picked himself up from the ground. He stood still, trying to block out the taunting voices of his captors.

"You know your friends can't save you now," said a soft, menacing voice behind him. He took that to be Felix. "They don't even know where we are, much less where we're taking you."

Ivan caught himself before he grinned. He'd had enough pain for a while. He was glad he was successful in communicating with Videll, but the hopes of a rescue still seemed dismal... He pushed that thought out of his head. His friends had never failed him before. They would find him.

Poor Ivan! He's getting beat up quite a bit in this story! ^^

Oh yeah - when you see around something, it's Ivan talking mentally, and * is Videll.

***Chapter 8*: Indigo**

I HATE writer's block. T_T

Videll is mine, golden sun is not (though I wish it was).

Poor Ivan... considering he's my favorite character, you wouldn't think he'd get beat up so much... oh well. ^^

So, Ivan is being dragged toward Jupiter Lighthouse by Alex and Felix, the other four heroes are between Venus Lighthouse and Lalivero planning a way to get him back and keep the lighthouse unlit... what suspense.

"This is it." The party stopped behind Isaac, breathing hard. They had been running the whole day, for several days now in fact, with little rest to gather their energy. Now night had fallen, and they had finally reached their destination: Jupiter Lighthouse.

"We have to keep going, don't we?" asked Garet wearily. He had not enjoyed the long run to the lighthouse. Isaac just shot him a look and stepped inside the lighthouse entrance. But before his foot so much as touched the marble floor, lightning spread across the doorway, glowing with a blinding violet light.

"Here, I'll do it." Videll stepped up to the barrier and closed her eyes. She began to glow a pale purple, and the lightning bolts left the doorway to greet her, swirling around her brilliant form. Then, with a blinding flash, they vanished.

Videll opened her eyes, looking very refreshed. "Come on," she said, motioning to the rest of the group. They stepped inside and took in the surroundings. Everything was a very pale purple, including the smooth tile floor beneath their feet. This was made of swirled marble: white and lavender. The doorways and staircases were elegantly simple, and luminous stone inlays in the shape of lightning bolts adorned the doorframes in a breathtaking shade of indigo. A large lightning bolt in the same purple stone graced the center of the floor. It would have been dark inside the lighthouse, but the whole interior glowed with a deep indigo light, seeming to come from everywhere at once.

Isaac shivered. "I think I prefer the Venus Lighthouse," he muttered. Gareth and Mia's thoughts reflected his. Only Videll was at home in the eerie luminescence of the building.

"So... where do we go?" Mia asked, addressing the many doors and staircases lining the walls of the room.

"Up seems like a good idea," Videll suggested. "The sooner we get to the beacon, the better." Everyone agreed with this, and they began to climb the longest staircase, their footsteps echoing throughout the room.

"Strange," Gareth muttered.

"What's strange?" Isaac questioned. He was glad to break the silence that had blanketed the group.

"Venus Lighthouse had some of the toughest monsters we've seen, but... we haven't encountered any in this one yet."

No one had an answer for that. "Maybe Felix and the others scared them away...?" Videll knew as she spoke the words that they weren't true. "Something is definitely not right here..."

The Adepts were now very high up. The staircase was still spiraling up and up around the walls of the lighthouse. It seemed to go straight to the top, they realized, without any obstacles. It was too easy...

Suddenly Mia spotted something on the wall of the lighthouse. "What's this?" she asked, running over to inspect it. She began to read aloud: "Lifesaving indigo. The party that solves this riddle will gain entrance to the next area of this lighthouse..." Everyone wracked their brains for an answer to the riddle, but to no avail. They were about to continue up the the stairs when the Ice Gargoyle exploded from the wall.

Videll was flying through the air. She braced herself for some kind of impact, but none came. She was suspended in a sea of indigo.

Isaac found himself hanging onto the edge of the ruined staircase. He looked down and two unpleasant sights met his eyes. One was the dizzying height he was hanging from, and the other was Mia dangling below him, both hands clasped firmly around his ankle. He shut his eyes, trying to stay calm and think of a way out of this mess. When he opened them, another terrifying image was before him.

Videll's clothes were fanned out around her, her hair forming a purple halo around her head. She hung suspended in a beam of indigo light streaming from below. When Isaac summoned the courage to look down, he saw that the source of the light was the lightning symbol on the floor of the lighthouse.

Garet cursed inwardly as he tried desperately to think of a way to get rid of this monster and save his friends at the same time. Normally, a single Ice Gargoyle was nothing to worry about, but for one thing, this was Garet alone, not their entire party, and for another, it was almost impossible to fight at such an awkward angle; one mistake meant falling to his death.

Finally, he decided he had to try. First, he used Flash to shield himself from any attacks projected by the Gargoyle. Then he cast Heat Wave, dashing in with Murumasa (spelling?) before the Gargoyle could recover. Or, that's what he had thought would happen. The enemy evaded easily, and pinned him to the ground before he knew what was happening. The monster grinned evilly, taking its time in delivering the final blow.

Suddenly, Videll's voice echoed in his mind.

Stay very still, Garet.

A massive lightning bolt shot down onto the stair, missing Garet by inches. It succeeded in hitting his captor, though, and a Heat Wave combined with a Shine Plasma was more than the monster could handle. It gave an angered cry as it disintegrated into nothingness.

The light that had held Videll shifted, bringing her over the stair. Then it faded, and she dropped lightly to her feet, looking a little shaken.

Isaac had begun to slowly and painfully pull himself and Mia back onto the stair. Coming back to reality, Garet and Videll bent to help him.

When all four Adepts were back to safety, they sat down and tried to decide what they could do next. The stair was no longer climbable, having a huge gap in it where the Gargoyle had forced the wall outward.

A sparkle from the hole in the wall caught Videll's eye. Pushing aside shards of marble, she found a shimmering purple gem in the hollow the Gargoyle had come from. Picking it up, realization hit her.

Lifesaving indigo.

Comments, suggestions, anything? Please review!!!

At least one more chapter of the lighthouse... my writer's block is fading. Inspiration has returned! Muahahahaha!!!

Ahem Okay, I'm sane again.

Review is right here:

I

V

***Chapter 9*: At the top**

Homework is evil. That's all I have to say.

Oh, yeah, thanks Vilya, Kaede, Norli, and Avaria for reviews.
Alex too, and whoever else has been reviewing that I forgot.

Everything made sense now.

"Hey guys," Videll spoke up. All eyes turned to her.

"Remember the riddle? Lifesaving indigo?"

There were a few seconds of silence. Then understanding dawned on the others' faces. Except Gareth, of course.

"What? What about the riddle?" Eyes rolled throughout the party. "What???"

"Garet," said Isaac slowly, patiently, "What just saved Videll's life?" Garet's face was still blank. "What *color* was it?"

"Oh... I knew that! Yeah, I, uh, really did!" The others ignored him, used to this behavior.

"And I found this." Videll held out the gem she had found in the wall. It shimmered with a silver light as the purple glow of the lighthouse hit it.

No one had any clue what the gem was for. "Well, let's go down and look more closely at that lightning bolt down there," Mia suggested. She glanced at Gareth and added, "That's where the light came from, after all."

After a good two minutes of walking the stairway, the four arrived back at the ground floor entrance. The lightning emblem was glowing a bit more brightly than before. Kneeling to examine it, Isaac made a discovery.

"Hey, there's a hollow here!" The others bent down as well, to see a small indent about the size of a fingertip near the center of the symbol. It was exactly the size of the gem Videll had found. Dropping to her knees, she placed it inside the hollow. It settled in with a small click, and the emblem flared with bright light. The same indigo beam as before shone heavenwards, and the four Adepts began to slowly rise off the ground.

They joined hands and rose up, into the light.

The light faded, and their feet touched stone. They were in a dimly lit room that was very different from the elegance of the Lighthouse entry. The floor and walls were cold, gray stone, and the room was very drafty, bringing chills to all but Videll.

Garet glanced at a doorway in the far wall. "Come on, let's go. The sooner we get out of this room, the better." He stepped forward.

"Whoa, hold on a sec!" Videll jumped forward and caught Garet by the back of the cloak, earning a glare.

"What? Let's go!"

Videll groaned. "Don't tell me no one else has noticed *those?*" she asked, pointing to the walls of the room. They were lined with what looked like small metal vents, which were blasting powerful gusts of wind at intervals.

Garet shrugged it off. "So I would have been blown over toward the wall. So what?"

"Well, that particular wind current would take you right over *there*."

The others turned to see a sheer drop out of a hole in the wall. "Oh, man," Isaac groaned, looking wistfully at the other side of the room, "It'll take us forever to get through this wind maze and over there!"

Videll was looking smug. "What's so funny?"

"It won't take as long as you think." And with a wave of her hand and a surge of Psyenergy, the wind swirled tightly together toward the ceiling of the room, then disappeared entirely.

"Show off," Garet muttered. Videll said nothing, just smiled and started across the room. When they reached the other side, the smile was wiped off her face, replaced with a serious look.

"We're getting close," she informed them. "Get ready."

They stepped through the doorway and shielded their eyes against the sudden light. They were standing at the foot of a long stair leading right towards the sky - and the top of the lighthouse. Voices were drifting over the wind. Just as Isaac made out the words "get rid of him", Videll let out a strangled cry and tore up the steps, running as fast as her legs could carry her.

Videll reached the top of the stairs and threw up her shield. She drew in her breath as the pain shot through her, forcing

her to her knees. But she didn't give up. Slowly, shaking with the effort, she drew herself up and stood strong against the pain, vowing she would keep her shield up for as long as she had to. She wouldn't let them kill him. Not Ivan.

Ivan trembled under the fierce glare of the man called Agatio. The shield still surrounded him, and the man did not like it. Suddenly, he let out an angered cry and struck the shield with all his might.

He watched helplessly as Videll screamed in pain and fell to the floor of the lighthouse. But the shield still stood. She was alive.

Unfortunately, Agatio had noticed this too, and began to stalk towards Videll. Ivan struggled desperately against the bonds that held him, but it was useless. Videll lay still, unmoving. And Agatio was almost there...

CLIFFHANGER!!!!!! Yes, I am evil. ^.^ Review and I will continue!

***Chapter 10*: The Battle**

I'm writing this on about five hours of sleep, so let's hope for the best. ^_^

I'm not doing disclaimers anymore - you all know who owns Golden Sun, and it's not me.

A burst of flame erupted underneath Agatio, knocking him back. (You didn't really think I'd kill my own character, did you?)

The other three Adepts rushed up to Videll. Isaac pulled her up off the ground, not taking his eyes off of Agatio and the others. Her eyes flickered open.

"Ivan?" she asked immediately. Her voice was faint.

"He's fine - well... not dead, anyway."

Videll turned toward the enemy party, looking ready to kill. Besides Alex and Felix, there were two new faces. One was the tall, muscular man who had tried to kill Ivan. He looked very much like Saturos, with the same red eyes and similar hair. Standing next to him was a woman with long hair like Menardi's, only a bright red. Isaac could guess that anyone to mistake her for a weak girl would regret it.

"How did they get up here?" muttered Felix, eyeing the Adepts. "Without Ivan..."

"It's the girl," sneered the woman in a feminine voice.

"I doubt she could be much of a challenge," smirked the man in a deep, hard voice. "A weakling like her. They probably just dragged her along so they could get into the lighthouse."

Videll's eyes flashed, and sparks of lightning began to play across her fingertips.

Isaac laid a hand on her shoulder, a silent order to control herself. "Surrender now, and we might spare you," he said coolly.

"And let Ivan go," added Videll softly.

"Hmmm... no, I don't think we will," said the man in a mocking voice. "But we won't kill him yet, either. We'll have a little fun first." He grabbed Ivan and, smiling, flung him headfirst into the lighthouse railing, where he lay still, unmoving. Videll silently vowed she would kill that man someday.

"Now then," he continued calmly, "I don't think we've introduced ourselves. We are Agatio and Karst, future rulers of this planet." Garet made an amused noise behind his sword.

"You think that's funny, do you?" Karst snapped. "I doubt you'll be so amused once you clash with us." Then, with a small smile, she tossed something over her shoulder and into the lighthouse beacon.

A shaft of violet light shot from the beacon, lighting up the night sky with its glow. Then it burst into a hovering lavender globe, shimmering with silver luster.

Not a smart move, Videll thought to herself. The power of Jupiter flowed through her veins. She felt strong, invincible.

Nothing would stop her now.

"If we must fight you to get Ivan back, we will," Mia said coldly. She appeared calm, unphased by the lighting of the beacon.

"I don't know if fighting you would be much fun," Agatio taunted. "Maybe we should save our strength for a more powerful enemy." He recieved no response from the four Adepts - just cold glares. He shrugged. "Fine. Have it your way."

He signaled to Alex and Felix, and they moved back, guarding the prisoners. Besides Jenna and Kraden, there was another girl with them. She had short blonde hair and purple eyes.

Sheba, Isaac thought.

Agatio, Karst, and their challengers assumed battle poses, and the fight began.

Agatio made the first move, slashing at Isaac with his sword. He caught him unprepared for the early attack. Seeing his weakness, Karst began to move toward Isaac as well, but Garett called on Flash, easily deflecting the blow. Mia took this opportunity to heal Isaac.

Videll concentrated the power that fought to escape her, and let it out. Spark Plasma shot down onto Agatio and Karst, but they weakened only slightly. Now the Adepts were hit with Inferno.

Flash helped a little, but the blow was still heavy. Mia unleashed Spritz to heal the party's wounds, and Isaac

unleashed Mother Gaia. Garet followed up with Flare Storm before their enemies could recover.

Seeing that her friends were doing well, Videll slipped away from the battle. Staying low, she made her way through flashes of Psyenergy and raining debris to where Ivan lay. Getting a good look at him, she nearly cried.

His hair was tangled and dirty, and his clothes were smeared with mud, grime, and something else. She bent closer. Blood. Every inch of skin visible was covered in cuts and bruises. Biting her lip, she gently wiped away the mud on his face. A large bruise was spreading across his cheek, and a fresh cut ran from his chin up to his forehead.

Suddenly she heard a warning shout from her friends. Pulling Ivan close to her, she ducked low, keeping herself between him and the fight. A pillar shattered behind them, showering the two Adepts with shards of marble.

Seeing her chance, Videll pulled Ivan behind a statue of Atlanta before the dust cleared. Still sheltering him from danger, she cast Blessed Wind.

Ivan awoke in Videll's arms. Something was going on behind her that he couldn't see... "What's going on? Where is everybody?"

"Fighting," she replied. She pulled a small knife from her boot and sliced the bindings that held Ivan. Once she thought it was safe enough, she set him down. "Can you stand?"

"Yeah." He stood, and saw the scene behind Videll. Mia was down, blood smeared across her limp form. Karst and Agatio

were still fighting, as were Isaac and Garet.

"I think we might win this," Videll said. "Isaac can revive anyone if we can give him the chance..."

Her voice trailed off as Isaac fell.

Hehe... yeah, another cliffhanger. This *should* be the last one for a while, though.

Now REVIEW!!!

***Chapter 11*: Jupiter**

Okay, I can honestly say I've been busy. Cramming a big social studies project into three short days doesn't leave you with much spare time.

Disclaimer: Guess.

Videll tried to sum up their situation as she and Ivan ran back towards the fight. Isaac was down, he was the only one who could revive. Quartz and Dew were the only two reviving Djinn, and Mia was down, too. There was no time to try to use water of life; their enemies would just strike them down as soon as they started to get it out.

She was pulled out of her thoughts by a shower of flame. Her reflexes were fast enough that she got out of the way in time.

Ivan had already made it back to Gareth, who wasn't looking too good. Ducking behind another statue, she sent Blessed Wind his way. At this distance, it wasn't fully effective, but it was enough. Gareth took advantage of his recovery and hit Agatio square across the chest with Murumasa.

Agatio howled in pain and wildly struck out at Gareth. His blow connected. The force he had put behind it in his pain threw him right across the top of the lighthouse and into one of the railings. Videll, running back toward Ivan, willed him to get up.

He didn't.

Ivan was no match for both the Mars Adepts. Where was Videll? Suddenly he was thrown back by the force of Inferno.

Videll dove. She caught Ivan inches away from a large statue by the stairs. His presence in her mind, that steady, comforting warmth, was fading. Quickly she cast Blessed Wind once more, and she felt him returning. His eyes opened, then widened as he looked over Videll's shoulder.

Pushing Videll gently out of the way, Ivan concentrated. Luff materialized on his shoulder, its aura leaving Ivan and surrounding Agatio. The wall of flame that had been about to engulf them faded.

Karst was quick to follow with her own spell. Fireballs showered around Ivan and Videll, causing a red, fiery hue to envelop the whole lighthouse top.

Videll searched frantically for Ivan in the sea of flame. She found him, and they huddled together at the base of the statue, as close and small as they could get. It wasn't enough. Videll threw up her shield, protecting them from the searing flames. She squeezed Ivan's hand tighter as she felt the unbearable heat tearing at her.

It felt like ages that she lay there against Ivan, pain reverberating through her. Finally the flames faded, and she let the shield drop. Karst looked truly shocked that her attack had not totally obliterated them.

Taking this opportunity, the two Jupiter Adepts raised their joined hands to the sky. The power of the lighthouse coursed through them, with a will of its own. Massive bolts of lightning seemed to tear the sky in two as they struck down their enemies.

The Mars Adepts' pain was evident as they emerged from the storm of lightning. "We have to separate them!" hissed Karst. "Keep the healer away from him!"

Instinctively, Ivan and Videll joined hands, drawing closer together. A cruel grin slowly spread across Agatio's face, and he held out one hand. A blast of flame shot up between them, forcing them apart. Karst then sent Videll flying to one side of the lighthouse, flames blinding her.

Suddenly, Videll was surrounded by a red bubble of light. She tried to rejoin Ivan, but the bubble kept her trapped inside. Getting desperate, she aimed Shine Plasma toward the enemy. Her power was simply absorbed when it reached the wall of the shield. All she could do was watch helplessly as the two closed in on Ivan.

It was torture watching the battle. Twice she instinctively cast Blessed Wind, but the spell was trapped inside the shield. Then they started hurting her, as well. The shield repeatedly filled with flames, and her own shield could only do so much. Soon both Jupiter Adepts were as weak as the Mars were.

Videll dropped to her knees as the flames surrounded her once more. The pain wouldn't let her concentrate enough to bring up her shield, and she was sure she would die right then. Finally the flames ceased, and she slowly opened her eyes.

Then despair filled her as she saw the scene before her.

As the flames that had been showering Ivan faded, she saw him waver. Then he collapsed on the floor of the lighthouse, pain and exhaustion clear on his face.

She felt herself going too, and Blessed Wind was sucked up by that awful shield as soon as she cast it. She sent a prayer up to the god of Jupiter that her friends would be all right. The world was blurring together...

Then everything snapped back into focus. When she looked up, she was nearly blinded by the violet light that was everywhere. The beacon was glowing and expanding, sending its power into her. She rose to her feet, eyes glowing with the very essence of Jupiter. She saw the brilliant lavender form that was Ivan rise up also, and she knew then that they had won.

She pressed a hand against the shield that had so cruelly imprisoned her, and it shattered. She ran to Ivan, faster than she had ever been before, and took his hand.

No words exchanged, the two turned as one, and called lightning from the sky. The power of Jupiter cascaded through them, through the lighthouse, and through the sky as they cast Spark Plasma.

The lighthouse split, and Agatio and Karst finally fell. They fell all the way, into the lighthouse like Saturos and Menardi before them.

As the light began to fade, the two powers of Jupiter saw Felix hiss something to Alex. Alex looked hesitant, but Felix held up his fist, and Alex obeyed. In the blink of an eye, the prisoners and their guards were gone.

Videll turned to Ivan. The lighthouse's power was leaving her, and she realized how tired she really was.

She was too tired to speak. *Water of life?*

I have two he replied. He dropped to the floor of the lighthouse, and pulled the golden liquid from his robes.

Videll had one as well. Tiredly they revived their friends.

After everyone's questions were answered, the Adepts were too tired to move. Curling up on the floor of the lighthouse, they fell into a deep, peaceful sleep.

Finally done! That took a while. Please review!!!

And all of you who haven't been updating, UPDATE OR ELSE!!!

***Chapter 12*: Snow**

Argh. No, people, that was not the last chapter! Not nearly!

I should really be doing my English homework... .

Videll drifted back into consciousness, and immediately curled up tighter. It was *cold*. Still half asleep, she snuggled closer to the warmth next to her...

...and bumped noses with Ivan. Opening her eyes, she saw that their entire group had formed a little Adept cluster during the night. Looking up, she saw why.

Snow? That couldn't be right. It had been spring yesterday. Carefully, she freed her foot from Isaac's cape, trying not to kick Mia in the face as she did so. As she shook the layer of snow off her clothes, she felt Ivan wake up next to her.

He shivered, pulling his cape tighter around him. "It's *cold*," he said. Then a look of surprise came over his face. "It's - snowing?"

"I guess I'm not crazy, then," Videll muttered as she loosed her hair. It was full of snow and slush. "I thought it was spring," she added, shaking it out.

Ivan started to stand, then winced and fell back down. "Ouch," he muttered as he pulled up his pant leg. There was a long gash running up his right calf.

"Let me see," Videll said, moving closer to him. With the care of a healer, she gently moved the cloth back to reveal the

rest of the cut. "I guess we were all really tired last night. We didn't even do any healing!" The two looked at each other, then at the rest of the party. The two Jupiter Adepts were covered in cuts and burns, results of the beating they had been given by the flame shields of Karst and Agatio. Gareth had a few minor cuts, and a painful looking bump forming on the back of his head. Mia and Isaac had both taken major damage from Agatio's sword, and had several nasty-looking gashes.

Videll sighed. "You first," she said, turning back to Ivan.

"Why me? Mia and Isaac are both looking pretty bad. You should do them first."

"Because I'm the healer," Videll said. "Now stay still." Placing one hand on a gash on Ivan's chest, and the other on his injured leg, Videll closed her eyes. The healing winds of her spell swirled around them, Ivan's wounds fading.

Next she examined herself, then healed what needed it. Ivan spoke from behind her.

"Are you sure you should be doing all this healing at once?" His voice was worried. "We just beat Karst and Agatio; you can't have that much energy left."

"Don't forget, we have two healers," Videll reminded him. She held out her hand toward Mia, and her cuts closed. "I'm sure Mia won't mind doing Isaac and Gareth."

"No, she won't." Ivan moved over to her. "You rest - I'll wake Mia up." He hesitated before moving away. "I just wish - we had more time alone." He brushed a kiss across her forehead before waking the others.

Once Ivan had woken Mia up, she had immediately assumed her position as mother of the party. She had gotten to work on Isaac right away, then fixed Gareth's head. Now the Adepts were huddled together in a small cluster, puzzling over the snow.

The weather wasn't the only thing that had changed. The landscape around them had also shifted. Plains had been replaced with forests, forests with mountains.

This posed a problem.

"I really *don't* want to hike through the mountains during a snowstorm," groaned Gareth, sandwiched between Mia and Isaac.

"It would take months to go *around* them, Gareth," Videll chimed in. She and Ivan had formed a warm little ball of Jupiter between Mia and the stairs.

"I just hope our food lasts," Isaac murmured, digging through his pack. They hadn't bothered to stock up at Lalivero when Ivan was captured, and their food was running quite low.

"But what did it?" wondered Mia, staring out at the endless blanket of white. Normally she enjoyed the snow, but not when she had to hike through it. "It wasn't like this last night. It was spring last night!"

"Maybe it has something to do with the lighthouses being lit," suggested Gareth. "Y' know, now that there's only one left, Alchemy's almost released or whatever..." He stopped when he saw the others staring at him. "What?"

Videll shook her head, a mischievous grin creeping over her face. "We're just surprised you of all people thought of that,

Garet."

"Hey!" He reached over to shove her, but she was ready, and jumped to the side, still smiling.

Ivan shivered as the cold hit his now exposed side. "Get back here, Videll, it's *cold*," he complained.

Videll gladly obliged, crawling back to the warmth she had left. Tucking herself back between Mia and Ivan, she thought of something else. "We're all out of potions and that stuff, too," she realized. "We'll have to do all our healing by hand. And the healers'll have to handle it if anyone gets sick," she added. "We aren't exactly prepared for cold weather."

Isaac made a face. He didn't like to think about that. Standing up, he started to stretch, then pulled his cloak tighter around him as the wind hit. "I guess we'd better get going if we want to get anywhere today," he sighed. The others rose, grabbing their weapons and packs; their bodies were trained to automatically obey their leader's orders.

Isaac closed his eyes, and a golden glow surrounded their small group. "Retreat," he whispered. In a flash, they were standing in front of the lighthouse entrance once more. Stepping out the door, they drew closer as the snow and wind hit them. Pushing forward through the storm, they began to move toward the new challenge that faced them.

The mountains.

There. And sorry if all my endings are cliffhangers, but really, everything is.

So *review*, and tell me what you think!

***Chapter 13*: Memories**

Why does homework even EXIST? I've had so much lately I've been plotting the storyline in bed.

And all you people who are asking about Hesperia and Karst and Agatio and all that good stuff, just hang on. *sagely voice* All will be revealed. ^_^

You all know the disclaimer.

It was *cold* in the mountains.

The Adepts felt small as they plodded along through the wind and snow, mere specks in the huge mountain range. Weak attempts at conversation were drowned out by the wind, and when there wasn't any, their words were lost in the muffled silence that blanketed everything.

Mia battled the wind alongside her friends. As the primary healer, she still found time to bustle between the others, adjusting cloaks and checking for any signs of sickness. The cold was becoming unbearable. Gareth was clearly pained with every step, as Mars has a natural aversion to snow and water anyway. Isaac was dragging his feet as he walked, and he had lost all leaderly determination as he shuffled through the snow. The two youngest lagged behind, leaning on each other for support.

Mia looked over her shoulder at the two Jupiter Adepts. Normally, she would be concerned for Ivan in this sort of weather, as he was smallest and youngest, therefore more vulnerable to the cold. But this time when she looked back,

she saw Videll's deep violet cloak wrapped around Ivan's shoulders. Smiling, she moved back toward Gareth. She took care of the party, but Videll would take care of Ivan.

Nearly an hour later, Mia's legs collapsed out from under her, and she sank to the carpet of snow under her feet. Her overtired muscles refused to carry her any farther.

The other Adepts looked at each other uncertainly. Ivan was in a similar position, leaning heavily on Videll in an effort to stay standing. They still hadn't found a place to stay the night.

All eyes turned to Gareth first, as he was strongest physically. Hiding his disappointment, he lifted Mia carefully off the ground.

"Can you carry her for a while, Gareth?" Isaac asked tiredly. Gareth nodded bravely, trying not to show his exhaustion. But Ivan was still a problem. Videll couldn't support him for long. "Are you sure you can't walk?" Isaac asked tentatively. Ivan shakily stood up, but he only took one step before he fell - back into Videll's waiting arms.

She had known he couldn't walk - hadn't it been obvious? Sighing inwardly, she scolded herself. Isaac didn't have a mental link with Ivan - he couldn't have known for sure.

The others watched in amazement as Videll, tired as she was, gently swept Ivan up into her arms. "Are you sure-" Isaac finally stuttered, "I mean, you're sure you can carry him?"

Gareth didn't wait for her answer. "I didn't think you could do that! Not after hours of hiking... What did you do to get you that strong?"

At this, Videll turned away. Only Ivan saw the tears in her eyes.

Garet and Videll couldn't do much under the weight of their burdens, so Isaac navigated. It was hard work without Garet's Psyenergy to clear the way through the snow and ice, but finally they reached a small cave in the side of a cliff.

Wearily, the Adepts filed inside. Mia and Ivan were lowered gently to the ground near the back. It was still extremely cold, even out of the wind, until Isaac found some twigs and branches that had been blown into the cave by the harsh winds.

The group moved toward the back of the cave as Isaac gathered the debris together into a small pile. Garet held his hands out in front of him, and closed his eyes. A small tongue of flame flared between his palms, and shot into the wood. Soon the Adepts were huddled around a crackling fire, warming their frozen hands.

The group was silent for a while, the only sound being the flames licking at the wood of the fire and, occasionally, someone moving closer to the warmth of the fire and their neighbors. Finally, Garet's curiosity got the better of him.

"So... what *did* you do - you know..." for once, Garet was at a loss for words.

"Garet..." Mia began, knowing this was a sensitive topic. Videll cut her off.

"No, it's all right... you deserve to know." Looking around the circle at the eager faces of her friends, she took a deep

breath. Then she began her story.

"I was born in Suhalla. It was just me, my mother, and my father, no siblings. My mother - ran away when I was four. And my father..." Here she stopped, resting her forehead on her knees. The others looked hopefully to Ivan, sitting next to her, but he kept silent. Just because he could see Videll's secrets didn't mean he would give them away.

Videll brought her head up again, looking deep into the fire. "My father beat me," she continued in a quiet voice. "He made me cook, clean, and do all the chores." She looked at Garet. "He made me carry firewood, lumber, heavy bags and boxes. Not just when he needed things moved, but just for fun. I would have to slave away for hours at a time, even through the night." Her fist clenched under her cape. "And if I couldn't do it, he beat me.

"But he made a mistake, because that got me strong," she continued, her voice steady now. "When I was ten, I ran away. I discovered my Psyenergy in the wild, when I had to fight off monsters on my own. Now that I had that, I could go anywhere I wanted. But because I was afraid my father would come after me, I headed to Tolbi. When I first arrived, the Colosso tournament was going on. I climbed a wall of the stadium and watched the battles. I was amazed at all the powerful warriors, and wanted to be just like that, so no one could hurt me ever again.

"After the tournament was over, one of the soldiers who had helped to run it found me outside the stadium. He brought me into the palace, and gave me food and a bed for the night. He was really surprised when I asked if I could use the palace's equipment to train, but he agreed to it. I quickly learned that no one else could see my power, so I trained it even more than I trained myself physically.

"Then a lady who *could* see it came, one with violet hair and eyes." The others glanced at Ivan, who was now staring into the fire himself. Master Hama? Videll had met her too?

"She told me that my power was called Psyenergy, and that I was a Jupiter Adept of the wind. She knew I could already read minds, and said that I would learn many other things, like how to see the future, and reveal hidden objects." She gently squeezed Ivan's hand as she talked, partly for her own comfort, partly for his. She knew how he felt about Master Hama.

"After she left, I tried to use these powers she had talked about. By the time I was eleven, I could use Reveal. I would roam around the palace where I stayed, and find all sorts of things hidden in the boxes and towers. At thirteen, I could see the future.

"Once, down at the docks, I was sitting by the edge of the Karagol, letting my mind wander. Then the wind brought me a vision from across the sea. I saw a boy my age sitting by the opposite shore, in Kalay docks. My Psyenergy showed me that he had the same powers I did." Again her voice grew softer. "I could tell he was lonely like me."

At first the others didn't make any connections, but as they looked at Ivan across the fire, looking so depressed, they realized who that lonely boy was.

"My visions started following him on his travels. I learned his name, and the names of the two boys he met in Vault. I watched the battle with the thieves. Every time they found a new adventure, I saw it all.

"I saw a girl join them. I soon learned her name as well, and watched the battle with Saturos on Mercury lighthouse. I was determined that I could go out and help with this mess

somehow. A year ago, on my fourteenth birthday, I left Tolbi."

Videll let out her breath, looking up at the astonished faces of her friends. "You know the rest."

There was a long, awkward silence. Finally Isaac spoke. "I guess none of us have really had... pleasant childhoods."

More silence. Neither Videll nor Ivan seemed in the mood to talk any more. Mia, too, looked troubled, and the others realized that Mia had never told them exactly what had happened in her past, what sad fate her parents had met.

The howling of the wind outside the cave entrance brought everyone out of their thoughts. In wordless agreement, the Adepts began to pull blankets from their packs, and assembled in the back of the cave, forming their warm cluster once more. One by one, they drifted into sleep.

Videll lay awake, wide awake. She had never talked with anyone about her past before, and it left her restless and uneasy. About to shift into a more comfortable position, she stopped abruptly as Ivan, lying next to her, slowly rose from his blankets. As quiet as the snow falling outside their shelter, he padded to the mouth of the cave and sat, his back to her.

As quiet as he had been, she rose as well. She crept through her sleeping friends and over to where he sat gazing out at the snow.

Ivan felt Videll's presence long before she sat down next to him. He didn't need to speak - she had felt the pain too, she understood.

Finally, someone who loved him. Thinking about the family he never had, he felt the tears he had held for so long begin to spill over.

She held him close, and let him cry.

Um... oh, yeah, review!

***Chapter 14*: Hesperia and Lemuria**

Yup, I'm still alive. I've been meaning to update since nearly a week ago, but I'm too lazy. I also had a writer's block like the Bilibin barricade in my way, but I will prevail!

MWAHAHAHA!!!!

Morning came, howling outside the cave and bringing a sharp chill into the air. The Adepts awoke shivering, even closer together than they had been on top of the lighthouse. The entrance to their shelter was nearly covered in sheets of snow and ice.

"Garet," Mia started to say, but the half-frozen Mars Adept already had a warm ball of flame glowing between his hands. Raising his arms, he sent the fire drifting up to the ceiling of the cave, where it stayed.

"We can't stay here," Isaac said, to no one in particular. "We have to get out of the mountains before the weather gets even worse, so we..." His voice trailed off.

A deep indigo glow was spreading through Ivan. First his eyes lit up, then his whole body pulsated with light as he rose off the floor of the cave. The others were blinded as the very air around them seemed to give off the same light as their friend. Just as they could take it no more, it all stopped. Ivan drifted back to the floor, landing back in his place between Videll and Garet. The light faded from him, the indigo fire in his eyes flashing one last time before it darkened like the setting sun.

Ivan dropped to his knees, his eyes haunted. Everything was still and silent, the only sound the wind and snow outside the cave.

"They're alive." Ivan's voice echoed through the cave, quiet and pained. "Karst and Agatio are alive."

"But how... how could..." That was Mia, sounding as shocked as Ivan himself was.

"They fell, but they... they weren't dead," He continued, sounding defeated. "They're in bad condition, but they're alive."

The others sensed that wasn't all. They were right.

"The Mars lighthouse is going to be... hard. I couldn't see the whole battle, but we were losing when it ended. I couldn't see it clearly, but it was really bad..."

Instead of sinking into despair as the rest of the group had, Isaac rose to his feet. "We'd better get going, then," he said. The others looked up at him questioningly. "Sitting around brooding isn't going to help us," he stated practically. "We can think about the future after we take care of the problem we have now."

Mia stood up too, smiling. "It's a good thing we have Isaac as a leader. He's right; we have to keep going."

The others rose, their spirits lifted slightly by this show of determination. Garet moved to the entrance and blasted the snow and ice away with a branch of flame. The group stepped out of the cave and were nearly blown over by the harsh winds. But they were determined to get out of the mountains, and they pressed forward bravely, overcoming

every obstacle in their way. Things were looking good for the Adepts.

Then it happened.

It started as just a low rumble, then grew to a roar. The Adepts moved together, looking around, panicking, trying to find the source. Then the mountain tumbled down upon them. Sheets of snow, ice, and even boulders rolled and tumbled down the mountain and over cliffs to rain down on them, burying them in icy depths.

All was silent.

Mia stepped from under the small overhang she had been thrown into, trembling with cold and fright. Her eyes darted from place to place. Where were her friends? All of a sudden, something caught her eye. She was about to dismiss it as a twig in the snow, when she noticed it had a distinct violet tint. Scrambling over rocks and ice, she came closer and saw it was a lock of hair! Digging frantically, she hit the jackpot. Videll popped her head out of the snow, gasping for air.

"Thank Mercury I found you!" Mia was close to tears. "I can't find the others, what if they're hurt, what if they're..." She couldn't go on, and sat in the snow trembling.

"Calm down." Mia looked up as Videll's hand left her shoulder, and saw violet light for the second time that day. Videll had her hands clasped over her head, and her eyes closed. Slowly, a purple luminescence spread over the hills and valleys of snow. Videll opened her eyes, beads of sweat forming on her temples despite the cold.

"Isaac and Gareth are over there," she told Mia, gesturing at a lump of snow off to their right. Mia gulped; the spot was inches away from a huge boulder. "Go, quick!"

Mia snapped out of her trance and hurried over to the spot. Videll scrambled over towards the mound that held Ivan, praying silently and feverently to every god and goddess of Jupiter that he would be all right.

The ice and snow stung her hands as she dug, but she didn't care. She was beginning to panic as she heard Gareth emerge from the snow. She was getting deeper; still no Ivan. Just as the first tear started to slip down her cheek, she felt cloth under her numb fingers. Clearing the last of the snow away, she pulled him from the freezing depths. He was cold and limp, his eyes closed.

"Ivan, wake up," she pleaded, shaking him. "Come on, please, please wake up! You have to... Ivan..."

Just as she started to dissolve into tears, she felt him stir. His eyes flickered open.

"Videll? What happened... what..."

"Oh, thank Jupiter, thank Thor, you're alive!" She started to cry in earnest now. "I... I thought you were gone... I thought I'd lost you..."

"I'm all right." Ivan slowly stood up, smiling despite his exhaustion. He helped Videll to her feet as well. Then they were both attacked by Mia, who pulled them both into a fierce hug.

"You're alive!" she sang. "We're all alive and well... I was so worried!" Gareth, who had summoned up yet another fireball to dry himself off, was smiling broadly behind Mia, clearly

happy to be out of the snow. Isaac was smiling too, but rather tiredly. They could all relate to that - they were cold, wet, and exhausted.

Wiping away her tears, Mia announced she was going to scout around for a place to rest the night - they clearly were not going any farther today. Isaac and Ivan were happy just to sit and rest, while Videll and Gareth decided to help Mia search.

After a while, Mia discovered that there was a small opening under the overhang that had sheltered her from the avalanche. The Adepts crawled in one by one, and discovered that the cave was a decent size, despite the minute proportions of the entrance.

They decided not to light a fire, for fear it would attract monsters. Instead, they left a small opening when they covered the entrance with snow. It was big enough to let a small amount of light in, but small enough to keep the wind out. Before they went to sleep, the girls went outside while the boys (except Gareth, who had dried himself with fire; only he could withstand it without getting burned) changed out of their wet things. Then they reversed positions. Once everyone was dry, they quickly dropped off to sleep.

All except the healers.

Videll and Mia were awake long after the others had drifted off. Something wasn't right, they could sense it in their very bones, a deep, uncomfortable, restless feeling. They sat up simultaneously, and looked at each other across the sleeping forms of their friends.

"Something's not right." Their voices came in unison, and they knew that if they both had the same thoughts, it must be true.

Whispering between them, they decided to light a fire, to take that risk. Mia took the firewood they had assembled for an emergency and struck her last dry match on the wood. It burst into flame, revealing Videll's worried face. She was standing over Ivan's still form, and dread was in her eyes.

"He's burning up." Mia moved toward the other healer, laying her hand on Ivan's neck. It was true - no wonder he had fallen asleep so fast. And yet, the others had, too.

Mia moved toward Gareth next, dreading what she would find. She was relieved to discover him much cooler than Ivan had been. Videll checked him as well, and they agreed that Gareth was all right. But Mia's spirits plummeted when her hand touched Isaac's forehead. He was even more feverish than Ivan had been, and Mia had to wipe sweat off of her hand after touching him. "This isn't good," she said, summoning Videll over to Isaac. Videll turned pale when she felt how hot he was, and she bit her lip, eyes wandering, searching for an answer.

She shook her head. "We're out of water of life, too," she said softly. "We have nothing that can help us..." her face set in determination. "Let's get to work."

The healers lined up their patients at the back of their cave, close to the fire. Wordlessly, Mia moved to Isaac and Videll to Ivan. They understood each other. Besides their own feelings, Mia was a more experienced healer, and Isaac was much worse off than Ivan was.

Essences of Pure Ply and Blessed Wind rebounded through the cave throughout the night, on for hours, but no matter how much the healers did for them, neither Isaac nor Ivan's fever went down; not even the tiniest bit. In fact they got

worse - nothing they did helped, and the two girls were losing hope.

Finally something clicked; something thrust straight through their hearts and their soul, something cruel and terrible. The two looked at each other and knew, knew that they were losing them. They were fading, and it was horrible watching, watching, and yet they could not do a thing to help.

They had all but given up. They abandoned their healing and took their friends into their arms, remembering everything that had ever happened, all the good times they had shared. Why us, Mia thought, why me and my friends, why now of all times, the one time and place where nothing can help. Tears dug hot tracks down her cheeks, and she kept Isaac close, as if holding him to her could save him.

Videll held Ivan tight, squeezing her eyes shut against the tears that poured from her, leaving her heart empty of feeling and emotion, just pain; pain that tore her apart slowly, agonizingly slowly. Why here, why now? He was going, he was truly dying, and there was nothing she could do, she couldn't save him. Oh, why Ivan, her sweet, beautiful Ivan? Why Isaac, her friend, her leader? Of all the people in the world, these two deserved life the most; why give them death, and rob them of the joy they so deeply, deeply deserved? She let the tears go, and rocked back and forth, never letting go of the one she loved.

They didn't know how long they remained like this; crying, and holding their friends tight. But they were brought back to their senses by a surprise.

"Hello?" A faint voice found its way to their ears, a voice that was so purely good it soothed their pain just by its sound. "Is anyone there?"

They heard the sound of footsteps drawing nearer, but they weren't afraid, they knew that this could save them somehow, and they hung on to its sound as it drew closer and closer. The steps hesitated outside the entrance to their sanctuary, and a man ducked into the entrance, straightening once inside.

His bright blue eyes smiled down at them, then turned worried as he saw the two they held. Stooping once again, he gently pried the patients from the arms of their friends. They did not resist, somehow still knowing that this man was good, and that he could help them.

"Which is worse?" The two girls knew that voice, the one they used so often; it was the crisis voice of a healer. Silently, Mia pointed to Isaac, and the man laid his hands on the limp form. The cave began to glow a pale blue, then flashed brightly and faded as quickly as it had come. The man felt Isaac's forehead and, seemingly satisfied, turned to Ivan. The girls sat, mesmerized, as the process was repeated, ending in the same touch to the forehead and satisfied look. The man turned to them, smiling.

Mia cleared her throat. "I don't believe we've met," she said politely. "Would you tell us who you are, and where we are? You know, all of this?" Mia gestured with her arms, taking in their snowy surroundings. "You're a Lemurian," Videll acknowledged quietly, and the man nodded.

"My name is Picard," he said, "and you are in Hesperia."

***** Yay, the chapter's over! Vilya should be happy, and all you other Picard-lovers. So review, and tell me how I did!

***Chapter 15*: Mystery**

My stash of ideas is running low! Hmmm, let's stick in a battle, take up some time.

Mia: *mutters something*

Or, I could have Mia die, that would add some drama too...

Mia: Eep! O.o;;

Just kidding. ^_^

Mia: T_T

"Hesperia?" Mia repeated, not quite believing what she had heard. "I know that's where we're *supposed* to be, but we never crossed anything that even resembled a border, much less an ocean..."

"That is what was intended," Picard replied. "The ocean is disguised as ordinary ground, so that Hesperia would not be discovered. It was a way of protecting the lighthouse."

"But wouldn't we have hit water anyway, even if we couldn't see it?" Videll inquired, confused.

Picard shook his head, and his eyes glinted gold in the firelight. "You were following the Psyenergy trail of your friend, were you not?" The girls nodded, waiting to hear more. "The party that had taken him knew the location of the one bridge that crosses it, so that was where the trail took you," he explained. "And who," he added, "do I have the pleasure of speaking with?"

"Oh, I'm sorry. My name is Mia."

"And I'm Videll."

At hearing their names, the Lemurian's eyes grew wide. "Ah, the ladies Mia and Videll. I was told we would discover you at some point, but I never expected it so soon..."

"What do you mean?" Mia asked.

He shook his head. "I am not the one to tell you that. But now, the reason I have come. Our foreseers in Lemuria had seen a group of five who were seeking our aid, and I was sent to find you, and bring you back to Lemuria. But first, what do you require of us?"

"Our friend Babi has been living on your draught," Mia replied, "and he is running low. We searched for your island, but..."

The Lemurian's eyes darkened. "Babi is a selfish man. But the work he does is good, and he has made friends with the Queen, so I do not have the right to speak badly of him."

"The Queen?"

"Yes; Babi discovered our island a hundred years ago, and made good friends with the Queen. She was the one who sensed that you needed help. I see now that Babi's draught was not the only reason I was needed."

He looked at Isaac and Ivan as he spoke. They already seemed back to normal; their cheeks, which had been flushed with fever, were normally colored, and they were sleeping peacefully. Videll hesitantly ran a finger over first Ivan's forehead, then Isaac's, and found them both startlingly cool.

Mia yawned, and Picard smiled. "The ladies must be tired, after the energy you put into helping your friends."

"I wouldn't say helped," Videll said, her face full of regret. "We didn't save them; you did."

"Ah, but you did help them," Picard told them. "If you had left them as they were, they would not have lasted until I arrived. But you must sleep; tomorrow we leave the mountains."

Everyone was awake, and in good health (much to the relief of the healers). Gareth and the other two boys had been informed of last night's adventure, and Picard, Mia, and Videll thanked countless times. Once the tales were done and Picard had been introduced, the plan was laid.

"I know this area well enough," Picard said. "I could lead you out of the mountains without too much trouble, but the monsters we may encounter are very dangerous. You were lucky not to have met any yet; but how long that luck will hold, I cannot predict."

"Well, we have to give it a try," Gareth stated, "or we'll just be stuck here for Mars only knows how long."

The others agreed, and they were soon off, Picard in the lead, Isaac and Gareth following, Ivan and Videll side by side in the middle of the group, and Mia watching the rear.

Picard proved to be an excellent guide, and they were led through all sorts of shortcuts. Many seemed to go nowhere, when suddenly they were back on an obvious path, seemingly much closer to clear ground than they had been before. The others, trusting the Lemurian but not quite

knowing what to make of him, sized Picard up from behind. He was handsome enough, with his long blue hair tied back over his broad shoulders, and a pleasant, kind face. His eyes seemed to be blue at first glance, but if you looked hard enough, they seemed to completely change into a soft, warm gold.

They seemed very close to their destination when Picard stopped in his tracks, hand on his sword. "Weapons out."

Videll and Ivan, Jupiter Adepts that they were, were already in position; Videll with her staff held out in front of her, ready to block any ambush, and Ivan with his Zodiac Wand ready to strike. The others quickly drew out their weapons from their various hiding spots; still nothing. Then the ground gave a sudden violent tremor, and an awful noise met their ears. Another avalanche seemed close at hand, but the snow stayed where it was.

A huge creature, seemingly part of the snow itself, lumbered up from the rear, wielding a huge mace of pure ice. Mia quickly backed up into the group, narrowly missing being trampled underfoot. She held out her hand toward the thing, and at her yelled command, missiles of ice formed out of the air itself, shooting forward and piercing the monster's skin. But the ice was only absorbed into the creature's body, and after a slight pause, it pressed on into the group.

They scattered seemingly randomly, but their battle instinct directed them well. They now had the monster surrounded.

They launched their attacks, Mother Gaia and Inferno hitting the creature first. Then a combination of Sonic Slash and Destruct Ray tore through the air, right on target. Ivan and Videll dropped their hands and jumped apart as the enraged beast fired a wave of ice at its tormentors.

Mia, knowing her Psyenergetic attacks would have no effect on this ice-based creature, stayed on the sidelines, rushing in when healing was needed. Gareth needed this most often, as he wasn't fighting near any healer, and she stayed near his side of the battle.

Picard had also given up his Psyenergy, and fought entirely with his sword, using only his healing Psyenergies during the battle. The others were amazed at his skill with the sword, and watched as he continually threw the monster against the wall of the narrow passage they were fighting in.

The Adepts were easily winning, but the creature had taken enough. With an ear-splitting cry, it launched storms of ice all around itself, burying the Adepts under waves of frigid tundra. Isaac had managed to dodge the attack, and attempted to fight the thing; but he wasn't strong enough alone, and was continually beaten back by the monster.

Videll burst free of the ice next to him, followed shortly by Ivan, and they joined the fight. They were doing well, and with a final Clay Spire, the beast lay still.

But not for long.

Suddenly, just as the fighters had begun to relax, the creature spun around, mace solidly aimed at the three Adepts. Videll had seen the attack coming just in time, however, and pushed her friends out of the path of the monster's weapon.

Instead of connecting with the two boys, the mace hit Videll squarely in the chest, sending her flying. She made contact with the wall with a sickening thud; she slid down the rock and to the ground, and stayed there.

Ivan let out a cry as the others emerged from the ice, and tried to go to her, but Mia held him back.

"They need you fighting," she told him firmly. "I'm a healer; I'll go."

Ivan tried to swallow his worry as he turned back to the fight, but it was near impossible. He just managed to stay in the battle without getting wiped out; he was blinded by fear.

The beast was backed by panic and rage, but it was tired. It was starting to be overtaken by the Adepts' power as Mia reached the fallen Videll.

She tried not to concentrate on the severity of the wound; it would only break her concentration. She closed her eyes and cast Pure Ply. Nothing. Getting worried, she gathered her energy into a more powerful Pure Ply; the wound was still unaffected, Videll remained unconscious.

Panic overtook her; how was this possible? Picard was busy fighting, cut off by the monster. She tried to calm her mind and search for something, anything, that could help; Videll would soon be gone.

Just as she was about to despair, she felt something awaken within her; something that had always been there, waiting. Her eyes opened, glowing a pale blue, and she concentrated everything she had into Videll's being. There was a blue flash, and the gaping wounds closed, Videll's eyes opening. Mia heard the monster fall, as if from far away, and she lay back on the rock wall, everything blurring together in front of her eyes. She heard her friends run up around her, felt Videll sit up next to her, and then knew no more.

Sorry about the cliffhanger; I really can't write any more tonight. Review and inspire me!

***Chapter 16*: Gifts of Good, Gifts of Evil**

YAY I have lots of reviews! I feel loved and hyper!!!

You can all thank Vilya, because her extremely hyper review inspired me to write this chapter (and yes, Vil, I know exactly what you mean by your Mercury senses tingling ^^).

"She's waking up."

Mia sat up slowly, feeling vaguely confused. Then the events of the battle came back to her. She lay back on her elbows, still slightly dizzy, trying to process what was going on around her.

Several worried faces came into focus above her. When she saw Picard's concerned look, she started to get really scared. It was hard to picture the Lemurian afraid of anything.

But Picard simply smiled, his worried look turning to one of relief. "How are you feeling, Lady Mia?"

She attempted to return the cheerful expression, but found it hard - nothing made sense at the moment. "What happened to me? Is Videll -" She stopped in mid-sentence when she saw Videll standing to her right, looking very relieved. Mia did manage a smile when she saw Ivan standing close beside her - she expected he wouldn't be letting Videll out of his sight for a while.

Glances passed around the circle of friends as Picard began an explanation. "Well - many things were revealed during that battle." He paused. "Now I am truly certain that you are the five I was sent for.

"There is a legend told in Lemuria of five Adepts who possess the powers of the Lemurians and the gifts of the gods. For that is what the Lemurians are blessed with - powers of the gods.

"The legend in full I will not tell you as of yet, but these five would set out on a journey to determine the fate of the world - and discover their powers on the way." He smiled. "I am just glad I could be here when it happened, so you could have a clue of what was going on. You will each discover your own gift in time. Mia's is Pure Faith, the Mercury Gift. I also possess this power - it is a gift to be thankful for. But," he added, "these powers will only be brought out in life or death situations, as this one was. For the Gifts are extremely powerful, to an extent that it could endanger the life of the one who wields them. Lemurians, who are naturally born with these powers, are not affected, but to ones such as yourself, it is draining to use them." His eyes became downcast, gray replacing their natural warm gold. "There was another who possessed a Gift," he said, his voice quiet, "and it took her life."

Videll, standing to Picard's left, sensed something significant in those last phrases, but the mind of a Lemurian cannot be easily read.

"This is what happened to Mia. Videll would have been gone before I could reach her, for the mace of an Ice Golem is an evil thing. The Gift chose its time well."

"Will we - see this legend?" Isaac faltered, not sure whether his inquiry was polite.

"Yes - the queen has ordered that you be shown the legend, for it is important in the fate of us all."

Silence once again claimed the group. Picard waited, letting them take it all in. After a while, he broke the silence.

"We still have a journey to make."

Garet was curious about something. "What kind of gift is the teleport skill that Alex has? Do the Lemurians also possess that power?"

Picard sighed as he rose. "Alas, that power can only stem from evil, even if it is not wanted. I know of the Alex you speak of - his fate has been tainted by the wills of those around him - those greedy and cruel."

Mia turned away from the group abruptly. "We'd better get going," she said, and walked out. Picard followed, a sad smile on his face. Even the two Jupiter Adepts wondered about the secret Mia held in her mind that they could not see.

The group stood at the edge of the mountains, on a slight rise, looking out on the land that was water. Picard turned to Videll and Ivan.

"I believe you could show us the bridge?"

The two clasped hands, and closed their eyes. Their Psyenergy spread over the landscape in waves, turning the

earth first violet, then a blinding white. As the light and luster faded, the true landscape unfolded before them.

All the Adepts could do was stare in amazement at the scene in front of them. The ocean was blinding as it reflected the sunlight in millions of tiny shards - but it was nothing compared to the bridge. The white stone shone so brightly that it was impossible to focus on anything else. The sides were drawn up into an elaborate twisting pattern, as if someone had taken a gust of wind, solidified it, and multiplied it a thousand times, for each section of the bridge was slightly different, and you could never tire of looking at it. When the five finally looked away, the brilliant white and amethyst still shone on their vision, the picture still clear in their minds.

"That is the Hesperia Arc, and our road," said Picard, and he led the group down to the start of the bridge. As they set foot on it, it seemed as if they were carried across by the wind - and they very well might have been, because their feet were so light and their journey so swift, that before they could even think ahead to the end of the bridge, they were once again in view of the Venus Lighthouse.

The shopkeepers at Lalivero were not happy when they heard the quantity of food and supplies the travelers needed, but one look at Picard was enough encouragement to keep everything going smoothly. The group enlisted the help of some of the shopkeepers, and soon their ship was loaded, boarded, and ready. At Picard's request, Isaac handed over the Black Orb.

Picard waved his hand over the Orb, and the ship seemed to glide out into the water with a will of its own. They were on the ocean once again, bound for Lemuria.

It's midnight. Happy Thanksgiving! ^^

Review, and make me feel loved. I'm going to sleep now...

***Chapter 17*: The Test**

FINALLY I get a chance to write. Sorry about the wait. ^^;;;

I know pretty much exactly what's going to happen for the next couple chapters, and my brain's been collecting little details and scenes here and there, so let's see what happens!

All the Adepts were glad to get away from the freezing mainland, even Mia and Picard. It had stayed cold for a while, but it was finally warming up. A sure sign of the improving weather was the fact that Gareth would stay out on deck for more than five minutes at a time; the first time in days he had dared to.

Everyone was relaxing on deck, enjoying the sunny weather, while Picard continued to steer the ship. They were expected to arrive at Lemuria sometime that day, Picard had told them, so, after packing a few things, the five friends had gathered into a group.

There wasn't much open conversation, excepting an occasional word exchanged between neighbors, until Picard walked over and joined them.

The five had noticed that the Lemurian's eyes seemed to change with his moods, and now they were slightly darker than normal, though nothing seemed to be amiss. Now they looked up, knowing he must have something to tell them. It wasn't often he left the Orb unattended.

He was silent for a few moments, then spoke. "We will be arriving soon," he began, "but there is something you need to know about entering Lemuria." Seeing that no one had a comment, he continued. "It has been a tradition for as long as anyone can remember for outsiders to take a test of sorts to gain entrance to our island. I don't know if it will be required of you, since you carry the Gifts, but you should be prepared nonetheless."

"What sort of a test?" asked Mia, looking slightly worried.

"Ah, Mia," Picard sighed, "I am afraid it is not an easy one."

The others were silent.

"First of all," Picard began resignedly, "items are not permitted other than your weapon and your armor. You will enter the Cave together, and complete about half of the Test in a group, but then you must split off for your individual ordeals."

"What will be our goal?" asked Ivan, alert and practical as always.

"To make it out conscious and alive."

Ivan's face visibly fell, almost regretting the question he had asked. Worried glances passed around the circle of friends as they wondered what lay in store for them.

After a few seconds, Isaac spoke.

"Have there been... any failures?"

"There have been some."

"Many?"

"Some."

More silence. Picard, however, had more to tell.

"After completion of the Test, all group members must wait in the goal room for all of the group to emerge. There will be a Vial in this room, for use of the first person to exit the Cave." Here he paused. "You must plan your strategy carefully. When you reach the point where you must split up, your best healer should go first." He glanced at Mia. "Any secondary healers should follow, so that the best healer can use the Vial, then heal the secondary ones, and they all can split the work of healing the others."

"So, we basically have to stay alive until the last person reaches the goal room," Videll stated. "Do we have to remain conscious?"

"No, once you exit the Cave itself, consciousness is no longer required. Only to remain alive."

Garet spoke, combining all of their thoughts into one phrase.

"This isn't gonna be easy."

"Land ho!"

Ivan slid from the crow's nest to the deck, landing lightly on his feet as he dropped from the rope. Videll watched him, smiling, but her eyes were worried. *What if someone doesn't make it? What if I never see him again?*

Ivan walked over to the others as they prepared to go ashore. He didn't want to be reminded of the danger ahead - didn't want to be reminded of that chance. Videll took his

hand, giving him a sad smile when he looked up into her eyes. He looked away, tears suddenly forming in his eyes, begging to be let out.

He squeezed her hand tighter.

The crew looked around themselves as their feet hit soil. Lemuria looked like a normal island, but a little way inland, there was what looked like a high wall reaching back into the distance. Over the wall, a few building tops were visible, but not nearly enough to get any impression of what Lemuria would look like once they got inside.

If they got inside.

Silence reigned over the group as they made the long trek toward the wall. Picard led the way, seeming to make for a large door in the side of the wall. As they got closer, several forms became evident against the marble.

They finally reached the doors. Torches set into the wall transformed the guards into silent silhouettes, but when they stepped into the light, they were revealed to be as kind-faced as Picard himself, and just as handsome. They seemed to be Mercury Adepts as well, and Mia wondered if all on this island were.

Picard forward, speaking to the guards in a language the five could not understand. They replied in the same graceful tongue, and, now moving to the group, proceeded to remove their bags and pouches. When all their items were in custody of the guards, Picard instructed them to step up to the doors.

A guard spoke. The five were surprised to find he had no accent - with the right clothes, he could pass for a normal citizen of Gondowan or Angara.

"Are you ready?"

The Adepts looked around at themselves and the others, then one by one nodded.

"Very well, then." The guard smiled kindly. "Good luck."

The other held out a hand, and the doors swung inward, revealing a dark void. With determined looks and deep breaths, the Adepts stepped inside the Cave. The doors swung shut behind them.

They were alone.

Isaac's voice pierced the darkness that surrounded them.

"Stay close."

They didn't need reminding - they were already so close that they could feel each other's breath. But somehow they grouped tighter.

Suddenly torches flared, illuminating their surroundings with a ghostly glow. They were in what looked like a tunnel of a cave, which continued forward into the dark. Slowly, still in a tight group, they moved down the tunnel. They jumped as another pair of torches burst into flame beside them.

Torches kept lighting at intervals as they made their way further down the tunnel, as if some unseen force knew where they were.

And maybe one did.

Eventually they ended up at a wall. A plain stone wall.

"Great," Gareth muttered. "We've barely started and we hit a dead end."

"I don't think so," Videll stated. "Maybe..."

Ivan, as if he had read her mind (and of course he had), stepped up to the wall and pressed his hand flat against it. He closed his eyes and a glow flared up under his hand, slowly spreading over the wall like violet fire burning through paper. It was no longer a wall, it was a door - and it swung inward, revealing blackness.

Cautiously, carefully, the Adepts moved into the room, hands linked so as not to lose each other. They hardly dared to breathe - who knew what was waiting for them in the dark?

The light came suddenly, revealing exactly what they were up against.

And it wasn't pretty.

Four Grand Golems, lined up and staring at them with blank eyes, claws gleaming in the light. Two Fenrirs, fangs dripping with poison.

"Dammit, there's more of them than there are us!" Gareth exclaimed. "How are we gonna pull this one off?"

"Just take them as they come," Isaac replied, one eye still on the enemy. "There's too many of them to plan it - something'll just go wrong. And Videll, Mia, try not to use too much Psyenergy unless it's needed. You two are the

main healers, and we're really gonna depend on you at the end of this."

Garet started to speak again, but a Fenrir lunged, and he just managed to duck as the deadly claws reached for his throat. He brought Murumasa straight up toward the ceiling, and the Fenrir fell away from the blade. In two pieces.

The cries of the other monsters echoed throughout the room, sending chills up the Adepts' spines. They swarmed toward the five like ants to a picnic - and with many of the same intentions. The fight was on.

A Grand Golem lumbered toward Videll. Fighting the urge to let out a Storm Ray, she took a defensive position and waited for the giant creature to make the first move.

It swung its claws at her, and she jumped, bringing her legs up under her and her arms out to the side. Clearing the thing's arm, she landed with her staff over her left shoulder. Swinging it across her body, she beat the monster back.

The remaining Fenrir, seeing that it was not a good idea to attack Garet, made for Ivan instead, leaping suddenly towards him. He did a slight backbend to avoid the sudden attack, the monster sailing over his head. With a quick twist, he thrust his hand into the air, and Destruct Ray hurtled down from the cave ceiling. The beast's knees buckled, and it fell to the floor, stunned.

Ivan raised his Zodiac Wand over his head to strike, but just as he made contact with the Fenrir's skull, a sharp pain shot through his shoulder, and his senses started to jumble and blur...

Videll, bleeding from a gash across her hip, heard the Fenrir's howl as it disintegrated. Gathering her strength, she

swung her staff hard at the Golem's head, and it fell to the ground, joining its comrade. Now, her view clear, she saw Ivan stagger forward as the Grand Golem behind him dislodged its claws from his shoulder. Cursing under her breath, she ran over to Ivan, holding him upright.

She winced when she saw the wound - it ran straight through his shoulder - but didn't waste time. Gently pressing her hand to the spot, Blessed Wind swirled around him, mostly closing the wound. He stood on his own, and with a smile and a quick "thanks", was back in the fray.

Isaac had seen the Golem the same time Videll had, and was there as quickly as he could. He ran the Gaia blade through the creature's back, but it spun quickly, sending him flying. Something stopped him, and he found arms around his waist. He looked up into Mia's worried blue eyes. She set him back upright, and he quickly fired a Ragnarok before the Golem could reach them.

The Golem still lumbered on. Running forward, Isaac delivered one last blow with the Gaia blade, and it finally fell. Out of the corner of his eye, Isaac saw Gareth dodge a Golem's claws and thrust Murumasa through it, then spin, sword out, slicing the other into halves.

It was over. The Adepts trudged to the center of the room, and were starting to size up their wounds when they heard the sound of grating stone. Turning, they saw an open door, opposite to where they had come in.

"I guess that's where we're headed," Isaac said. "No severe injuries?"

"Not anymore," said Ivan with a grimace. "I hate to think how many battles like this we'll have." *And how long our Psyenergy will last*, he added silently.

Videll agreed wholeheartedly, and told him so with a feeble smile.

New doubts were arising in everyone's mind as they headed for the next room. Especially when they saw what was in it.

Jeez, that took a *long* time. I was planning to go farther with this chapter, but it's getting late, and my inspiration is starting to wear off...

The test will definitely take another full chapter - in fact, it will probably take two more full chapters. So, review! Tomorrow's the last day of school before Christmas break, so updates should be more frequent than the last few have been... ^^;;;

Review!!!

***Chapter 18*: Challenges**

Hi again. Sorry again about the wait! I'll try to be good from now on... ^^

The Adepts looked up... and up... and up. It was a giant...

Rock.

"Oh, wonderful," Gareth moaned. "First they send a stampede of monsters at us, and now we have to lift *this* thing? What are they trying to do, kill us?" He held up his hand. "Don't answer that question."

"Well, we have to move it somehow..." Videll mused, looking up at the huge boulder. It reached up a solid ten feet, and was as wide as the tunnel they stood in. "Lift would be the logical answer, but it's just so *huge*."

Ivan fingered the lifting gem in his pocket, thanking Jupiter silently that they had been allowed to keep this kind of equipable item. He didn't know how much even Lift could do in this situation, though. They had never encountered an obstacle *this* big before. It also seemed to be getting hotter as they moved forward, and there was a flickering orange light shining from behind the boulder.

Isaac turned to Ivan doubtfully. "It *does* look awfully big, but it's worth a try. What do you say, Ivan?"

Ivan had his own doubts, but he stepped in front of the boulder and braced himself. Raising his arms in front of him,

he concentrated. A shimmering violet aura surrounded Ivan, then spiraled through the air toward the boulder. Feeling the spell take hold, Ivan gritted his teeth, and started to slowly raise his arms toward the high ceiling of the tunnel.

There was a grating sound as the boulder slowly left its place on the floor of the cave. Slowly, painfully slowly, it rose a few feet in the air. There was that glow again, shining brightly from underneath. The others could see the perspiration forming on Ivan's forehead as the boulder wavered. Then he staggered forward, and fell to his knees as it dropped back down to the floor with a thunderous crash.

Videll hurried forward, and helped Ivan back to his feet. "It's too heavy," he stated regretfully, still leaning on Videll's shoulder. "That's as far as I can get it." He was breathing heavily, and the others could see how much effort it had taken to lift the huge rock even that high.

"Well, maybe if we go one at a time..." Isaac suggested, "or maybe-"

"Whoa, hold on a minute," Videll said, and she sounded worried. "I just thought of something." The others looked at her, waiting for an explanation. "Even if we all manage to get under that thing, how is *Ivan* going to get under? It'll be hard enough for us, but how can Ivan hold up the boulder *and* get underneath it? I think it's pretty obvious it takes a lot of energy as it is..." She trailed off.

The group was silent for a moment. Finally Mia spoke. "I think," she said slowly, "I have an idea that might work. Ivan's the best at Lift, but someone else might be able to lift the boulder for a few seconds... at least for long enough for Ivan to get underneath..."

"And then they'll toss Ivan the lifting gem, and he can finish the job from the other side," finished Isaac. Mia nodded.

"But who will lift it?" she asked.

"Well, Gareth's the strongest..." Videll said slowly, "but I'm not sure if that's what counts here."

"I can give it a try, at least," Gareth said, stepping forward.

"All right," agreed Ivan, pulling the gem from his pocket. Gareth took it in his hand, and motioned for Ivan to get ready. Crouching near the giant barricade, Ivan put one foot back, ready to dash underneath the boulder.

Gareth closed his eyes. "On the count of three, Ivan. One... two... three!"

Gareth raised his hands up, forcing all his strength into the motion. The boulder rose up only about three feet, but Ivan sprang forward with the incredible speed and agility of a Jupiter Adept, rolling underneath the massive weight. Gareth just managed to keep it up long enough for Ivan to squeeze under, and there was a ripping sound as part of Ivan's cape was trapped under the falling rock.

"Ivan!" Mia called. "Are you all right?"

"Yes," he called back, "I'm fine - but there's fire over here!"

"What?!"

"Don't worry, It's not going to spread - I think we just have to get past it. But we'll worry about that when we come to it. Can I have the lifting gem, Gareth?"

"Okay..." Gareth tossed the tiny gem over the rock, and a small thud was heard as it hit Ivan's palm.

"Tell me when I should lift."

"Okay, so how should we do this...?" Mia wondered.

"Well, before we plan anything else," stated Isaac, "only one of us can fit underneath at a time, and I think Videll should go first. That way-"

"Why?" began Gareth hotly. "If you-"

"Let me *finish*, Gareth," Isaac said, glaring at his friend. "I was *going* to say, since those two can share Psyenergy well, Videll could help Ivan if it was needed."

"Sorry," said Gareth sheepishly, looking down at his feet.

"That's all right," Isaac sighed. He turned to Videll. "So, will you go first?"

"Okay," she said, assuming the same stance Ivan had. Taking a deep breath, she called to Ivan. "Ready, Ivan? Tell me when!"

Ivan counted off the way Gareth had, and the boulder rose, admitting Videll as she rolled underneath. Peeking under, the others could see Ivan's small frame outlined against that fiery glow, and could now see that it *was* fire, just as he had said.

Videll stood on the other side of the boulder and had to shade her eyes from the light of the fire. It was unbearably hot, and she was starting to sweat just standing in front of it. Looking around, she saw Ivan collapse to his knees on the cave floor.

She rushed over to him, mentally praising Isaac for sending her under first. It looked like Ivan really would need help.

He looked up as she bent down next to him, and gave her a weak smile. "Are you all right?" she asked worriedly. He was breathing heavily, and the heat probably didn't help his condition. She instinctively put a hand to his forehead, but knew that was silly. Of course he'd be hot - they were in front of a fire!

"I'll be all right," he assured her as she pulled him to his feet. "It's just - tiring."

Videll managed a feeble smile through her worry, and moved behind Ivan. "Good luck," she whispered, and kissed him on the cheek. "Be careful - don't overdo it. I'm here in case you need help." Isaac called from the other side of the boulder for a Lift, and Ivan got ready, Videll supporting him from behind.

"One... two... three!"

The boulder rose once again, and this time Gareth scrambled under, with much less agility than the two Jupiter Adepts had. It took only a few seconds longer to get Gareth underneath it, but it felt like ages to poor Ivan. Finally the boulder dropped, and Ivan fell back onto Videll, exhausted.

Garet stood near the tunnel wall, looking smugly at the two of them. They all thought he was so ignorant! Anyone could see they were in love, even him. He leaned back, enjoying the heat of the fire pressing on his skin, and waited.

Videll stood in the heat, supporting Ivan as he recovered. She hated to think how much of his Psyenergy this was using! How was Ivan supposed to get through this alive if his

energy was being drained like this? Pushing the awful thoughts from her mind, she waited for her friends to call.

Ivan heard Mia's voice from the other side of the boulder, and slowly stood. He felt as if he was burning. Raising his arms, he slowly counted off for Mia, and concentrated.

The boulder rose much more slowly this time, and Ivan felt the spell weaken. Just as he started to panic, thinking Mia would be crushed underneath the massive weight, power surged through him. Raising his arms higher, the boulder lifted, wavering for a second in the air, then dropped as Mia reached their side of the tunnel.

He wasn't aware of Videll's hand on his shoulder until it left. He sunk to his knees, leaning on his staff, and tried to ignore the burning pain that comes with exhaustion.

Videll leaned against the wall of the tunnel, eyes closed. Now she knew what Ivan felt like - lifting that thing was exhausting! She had only lent a small surge of her power to the spell, but it felt as if every ounce of it was gone.

Opening her eyes, she came to a decision. "Isaac!" she called. "Can you hold on a minute?"

"Sure. Tell me when."

Videll walked over to where Gareth and Mia were sitting around Ivan. "This is ridiculous," she told them as she sat down next to him. "If he has to do this again, his Psyenergy'll be gone before we're half through with this test!"

"But what else can we do?" returned Gareth. "We're obviously not leaving Isaac behind!"

Videll bit her lip, trying to think as she looked at Ivan. He had his head down, resting on his staff, and she could sense his exhaustion. "I can give him some of my Psyenergy to use; that way he won't have to deplete his at all," she decided. Now that she knew what it took to lift that massive weight, she wasn't going to let Ivan do it alone.

"That's just as ridiculous!" protested Mia. "It won't be any easier for you."

"I know that, but I haven't already lifted that thing four times! We can at least try to balance the work a little more."

"All right..."

Videll's mind was made up, and the others knew not to argue with her. Now she spoke to Ivan as the other two stood.

She brushed some of his soft blonde hair aside so that she could see his face. "Ivan," she called softly, "are you ready?" When he opened his eyes, she helped him stand, and Garet called to Isaac to get ready.

This time, since Ivan had been resting, he could stand and handle most of the spell alone, so all Videll had to do was feed her Psyenergy into his. Isaac rolled under in a flash of color, his yellow scarf fluttering behind him.

Videll let go of Ivan's shoulders, and turned to lean on the wall, Ivan sinking to the floor.

"We'd better rest a little before we go on," Mia suggested, eyeing the two exhausted Jupiter Adepts. "Who knows when we might be jumped by another group of monsters."

Isaac and Gareth stood guard while Ivan and Videll rested, Mia watching them to make sure they were all right. After a few minutes, Videll had recovered entirely, and Ivan was feeling well enough to handle a battle.

Now the Adepts turned to the wall of fire that was blocking the tunnel. It was so bright that it hurt their eyes to look at it for very long, even Gareth. The answer was obvious, and Mia stepped forward.

With a yelled command and her arms toward the fire, Mia cast Douse, enormous quantities of water seeming to appear out of thin air, pouring down onto the flames with a hiss. The tunnel filled with steam as Mia continuously drenched the fire. It refused to succumb to the water, and repeatedly flared up again, defying the laws of nature. Finally it began to shrink, then dwindled down to nothing. The steam cleared, leaving a very wet, very tired Mercury Adept where it had been.

"They're really trying to wear us out, aren't they?" Mia groaned as she rubbed her temples. "I feel like I just put out ten Infernos!"

"You probably did," Isaac commented. "And they probably are trying to use up our Psyenergy. *That* will be a problem, too."

"That?" Mia asked, looking up.

The Adepts followed Isaac's pointing finger, and saw what "that" was.

Several very long, very sharp, very shiny blades were suspended on a metal frame several yards in front of them, illuminated in the torchlight. Every few seconds they

snapped back and forth, in such a way that anything in between them would be immediately dissected.

Garet groaned, pulling the Halt Gem from a pouch at his belt. The group walked forward until they reached the blades, being careful not to get too close. At least this wouldn't drain as much Psyenergy as the other two obstacles had. Garet lifted a hand, palm toward the whirring blades.

"Halt!"

The blades slowed, then stopped entirely as Garet closed his fist. "Now all we have to do is squeeze through them."

"All we have to do?" Mia repeated, eyeing the razor-sharp blades. "I'm not looking forward to getting through those."

"Well, would you rather stay behind?" Ivan asked as he slipped easily through the metal contraptions. He smiled. Being small had its advantages.

Mia ignored his comment. Videll went next, and, being only slightly taller than Ivan, passed through without incident. It was a bit harder for Isaac and Mia, but they managed. Garet, however, had a very difficult time, and when he finally got through he had several small cuts on his arms and legs.

Mia started to attend to Garet's cuts, but the sight of the drying blood around Videll's hip stopped her. Sighing, she turned back to the rest of the group. She hated having to use her Psyenergy sparingly - it wasn't natural for her to let a cut, especially one as bad as Videll's, go unhealed. But even the gash on Videll's hip wasn't serious enough for her to use Psyenergy on - not even a small Ply.

She shivered. "Is it just me, or is it getting colder?"

Mia was right. Gusts of cold air were pouring in from somewhere in front of them, in the darkness. Cautiously, the Adepts moved forward. Suddenly, the cold intensified, and they were standing at the entrance to a large, snow-covered room. Icicles hung from the ceiling, and pillars of ice connected floor to ceiling. The stone doorway behind them faded, leaving only a wall.

Then the rumbling started. The room began to shake, and ice fell from the ceiling. The noise was unbearable.

"This is getting a little too familiar for my tastes!" Gareth yelled over the sound. None of the Adepts got a chance to respond, as the snow underneath them suddenly bulged and exploded, sending them in all directions.

Gareth winced as he was thrown into a patch of ice spikes. When he got his wind back, he looked up. Just in time.

With speed he did not normally have, Gareth rolled to his right, barely avoiding the Ice Golem's fist. Raising a hand and scrambling to his feet, he fired a Heat Wave straight at the monster's head. It recoiled, emitting a piercing shriek, and lumbered off toward another target.

Videll allowed herself one Destruct Ray as the creature came toward her. Part of the Golem's arm shattered, falling to the ground in shards. Still it came on. Cursing the fact that she couldn't call on her Psyenergy, Videll brought up her staff in a defensive position, dodging as the massive fist came at her. She swung her staff, but it seemed to have no effect whatsoever, and the Golem quickly retaliated. Shards of ice formed in the air around the Golem, cutting Videll's face and body. Dropping to the ground, she did her best to avoid the frigid ice storm.

Ivan's voice rang out through the room, and the Golem fell back as it was hit with blinding lightning bolts. Then Ivan leapt into the air, Zodiac Wand held out, in a flash of purple lightning. A Jupiter Djinni's form flashed at the tip of the rod as Squall unleashed her power.

Now it was Isaac's turn. Chunks of rock and earth exploded from the cave floor, turning the snow a muddy brown. The Golem's form was lost in the rage of Mother Gaia as it pounded the monster, but it soon made itself evident as it lunged out of the fading spell, straight at Isaac. The deadly claws made a quick slash, followed by a blast of ice that sent the warrior flying. Mia dashed over to Isaac, where the snow was quickly turning a deep shade of crimson.

Tearing his eyes away from the sight of his wounded friend, Gareth thrust a hand toward the enemy. "Inferno!"

The Golem was thrown back several feet, and shrunk considerably in size as its icy form began melting away. When the flames cleared, however, fresh ice began to form around the weakened creature. It began a spell of its own, but Ivan called for Luff, and the icy mist faded.

Now Ivan stepped forward, a determined gleam in his amethyst eyes. He threw a hand skyward, and yelled the words loud.

"I summon Athena!!!"

The room was enveloped in a lavender haze, and time seemed to stop. A pale violet light began to grow in the air, and formed into the shape of a woman. Athena's lovely face looked down on the Ice Golem as she floated in the air, wings spread, surrounded by a bright aura. In a flash of golden light, a brilliant bow appeared in the goddess's hand,

strung with an arrow of judgment. She pulled the arrow back, string taut, and fired.

When the light and luster cleared, the Golem was gone. Ivan still stood in the center of the room, arms upraised. Now he lowered them, eyes glowing with exhilaration.

Isaac and Mia stood, and joined Ivan. Videll, covered in cuts, limped over to the rest of the group, as Gareth moved in to congratulate everyone.

"Well, that was fun," commented Isaac. "How many more of these things are we going to see?"

"I don't even want to think about it," muttered Videll.

Isaac looked her up and down. "You're not looking too good. Let me do it; we're going to need you at the end."

Isaac held out a hand, and a golden light surrounded Videll. Her cuts closed, the only thing remaining a scar across her hip.

Looking around, the Adepts saw another doorway in the wall of the chamber. Isaac led the way toward it, stepping over shards of ice and wading through snowdrifts. The door led into a hallway, and the hallway into a dark room.

Torches flared, illuminating the small chamber. A pang of sadness hit each of the Adepts as, one by one, they realized what was inside.

Whoo! That was a LONG chapter. This is gonna take longer than I thought...

Hey, lookie, it's the 24th! It's Christmas Eve! Whoopie!

Jeez, it's really late... early actually. Please review! Pretty please!

***Chapter 19*: Illusion**

I am way too busy for my own good... this chapter is taking over a week to write! *sob*

...'Kay, the test is going to take a while, so expect cliffhangers!

Before the five Adepts lay five metal doors; one a soft green, one a tranquil blue, another a raging crimson, and two in a gentle shade of violet. No one moved; the room was entirely silent. They barely breathed as they tried to accept what they had to do.

The room became decidedly gloomier as Isaac spoke the words they had all been dreading.

"It's time - we have to split up."

Mia trembled at the words - she was first, she had to leave. Taking a deep breath, she tried to convince herself that everything would be all right, everyone would make it out safely and she would see all of them again.

It didn't work.

She didn't know how long she stood there, trying to gather the courage to leave her friends, maybe leave them forever. They were the only ones she had, except for... but no, he was gone from her life now.

Finally Isaac put his hand on her shoulder, meeting her eyes with his firm gaze. She held it for a moment, drawing

courage from her leader, then turned and stepped forward.

The door farthest to the right slid open, the blue door. Mia hesitated, and turned back to her four friends, eyes taking in every last detail of their faces, their bodies, their clothes. Then she turned in a flurry of blue, and swept briskly through her door without looking back. It slid shut behind her with a finalizing thud, the sound echoing throughout the gloomy chamber.

"We should probably wait a while before the next person leaves," Garet stated, "to make sure that Mia finishes first."

Various gestures of agreement passed around the circle of four, and they waited in silence. Time seemed almost nonexistent in the dimly lit chamber, but Isaac was able to estimate what he hoped was five minutes.

"Videll..." He stopped speaking there - it felt cruel somehow to tell her to leave, even though they all knew she had to.

She silently moved forward, eyes drifting between the two purple doors, then settling as the door second from the right opened. She closed her eyes, pausing for a moment with her head down, before turning her back on the doors to look upon the faces of her friends one last time.

She regarded them with sorrow, a forlorn cluster of three standing in the torchlight. The ache in her heart intensified when she met Ivan's eyes. His fear and sadness showed clearly in the amethyst depths. Tears welling up in her eyes, she ran forward and embraced him one last time, then silently broke away and dashed through her door. A single tear fell to the ground before the door sealed her away, the sound echoing throughout the silent chamber.

Ivan held back tears of his own. He half-expected Gareth to make some comment, but the heavy silence remained unbroken. He stood, savoring the memory of her arms around him, and waited.

A few minutes later, Isaac stepped forward, a majestic silhouette in the torchlight. After a pause, he turned back to his friends with a warm, yet sad, smile on his face.
"Goodbye, Gareth, Ivan - and good luck."

The footsteps of their leader echoed through the cold room as he entered the green door, the middle door, then faded as it shut behind him.

The remaining two stood alone for a moment before Ivan moved forward. "I guess it's my turn," he said, addressing his friend.

"Don't get yourself killed," Gareth ordered, voice breaking.
"Or else I'll give you a good beating when this is over."

Ivan smiled. "You be careful too - wouldn't want to light your hair on fire or anything like that." His tone softened, and his smile faded. "Goodbye, Gareth."

Gareth could barely hear his light footsteps on the rock as he padded through the remaining purple door.

He eyed the red door, on the far left side of the wall.
"Goodbye," he whispered, and walked through.

Isaac took a deep breath, and walked down the corridor that lay before him. It was very different from the room he had just left, being well-lit, and more like a hallway than a

tunnel. It opened onto a large chamber lit by torchlight; the light was dim, but enough to see by.

He cautiously stepped into the room, only to find it completely empty. He was starting to look around, when suddenly doors all around the walls of the room slid open. He braced himself for an attack, but what stepped out of the doors was not a herd of monsters.

It was his friends.

Garet, Ivan, Mia, and Videll stepped into the chamber, each looking as confused as he was. They converged in the center of the room, and confused whispering ensued.

"What's going on?" "Where are we?" "I thought we were supposed to be split up!"

Suddenly their confused chatter died down, as another, bigger door crashed open. A huge beast stepped out, with three heads and glowing red eyes. Its bottom half seemed to be that of a lion, but the tail was long and spiked. White and crimson stripes ran down its necks and back, the bright colors contrasting with the deep black of its fur. It stood just above ten feet tall, and the Adepts had to strain their necks just to see its eyes.

The group slowly backed up from the monster, until their backs hit solid rock - the door which Isaac had come from had disappeared, as had all the others. Now they looked up into the face of the monster, drawing their weapons, and fanning out into a half circle around the beast, preparing for battle.

Mia started the battle off by firing chunks of glacier at the creature. It only took one hit before it retaliated, swinging its

tail around to deflect the ice chunks back in the worst possible way - straight at Garet.

Isaac watched in horror as the Mars Adept was thrown back against the wall, the Mercury energy leaving him gasping for breath. Mia rushed across the chamber to help him, but was cut off by a blast of fire from the enemy. She staggered back, clothes and face scorched.

The monster turned back to Garet, this time emitting an icy beam from its middle head. He cried out once, then lay still.

Isaac turned to see Ivan and Videll firing bright bolts of purple lightning at the creature, with little effect. He fired a Ragnarok at the thing's heads. It let out a cry of agony, and started to thrash wildly at the Adepts. Before Isaac could react, Ivan was down, Videll trying to shield him from the monster and heal him at the same time. The beast howled a command, and a ball of earth and rock exploded underneath the two Jupiter Adepts, rendering them both unmoving.

Isaac's head was spinning. What could he do? Three of their number were down, possibly dying. *Dead*, added a voice inside his mind. He ignored it, trying to think clearly. The monster seemed invincible, and only he and Mia were left to fight it. How could he save his friends *and* defeat the monster? He hesitated, thoughts jumbling as he tried to decide on a course of action.

He hesitated a moment too long. The monster struck out again, this time with an immense bolt of electricity. It hit Mia directly, and she let out a piercing scream before falling back into his arms.

He felt her wrist. No pulse.

Slowly backing away from the monster, he focused his power on a Revive. It was his only hope left - he couldn't do this alone, he couldn't lose another one of his friends.

They both started to glow with a golden light, Isaac closing his eyes and focusing his Psyenergy. He felt light entering her body, but there was something strange about the spell. There was a strange emptiness inside Mia, a darkness that repelled his Psyenergy. He gasped, eyes flying open as the spell rushed back into him.

It hadn't worked.

What was going on? What was this beast, that its attacks couldn't be undone? Revive had never failed before, and he had more than enough Psyenergy left. Something evil was going on, and now his friends were gone. Reality slowly sank in. They were dead.

He was alone.

Isaac stood in the middle of the chamber, unaware of the beast in front of him. Mia's limp form slid to the ground, and the warrior let out a cry of anguish. The earth beneath him reflected his despair, rippling in anger and sorrow. As the earthquake reached the corners of the room, a strange sound met Isaac's ears.

Had something cried out? He opened his eyes. The monster wasn't attacking, it merely stood in front of him, growling in its throat. The sound he had heard was too high-pitched to have come from it. Where had it come from?

Experimentally, Isaac let out another small earthquake. There was the sound again - definitely a cry of pain. As he turned toward the source, he saw something move in the shadows.

Or maybe it was the shadows that had moved.

Raising his hand, he cast Spire into the area of movement. The shadow creature cried out again, louder this time, and the scene around him began to waver and flicker.

He fired attack after attack at the creature. Slowly it shrank, and Isaac's surroundings began to become even more unclear. Finally, the shadow creature burst into tiny shards of darkness, then disappeared altogether. Isaac blinked. The giant monster was gone. He looked down at his feet; Mia's body was gone. Looking around the rest of the room, he saw it was exactly as before - torches on the wall, light flickering peacefully. All signs of the fight were gone. His friends were gone, as were the doors they had come from.

He took a deep breath, clearing his mind. Had it all been an illusion? And how did the shadow creature cause it? It had been so *real*...

He let out his breath, straightening up and looking for his next path. His friends were alive. That was all that mattered.

Mia entered the darkness.

Cautiously, she made her way deeper into the blackness, weapon held in front of her. For the first time in her life, she wished she was aligned with Mars, not Mercury - anything could take her by surprise in the dark.

She took small, quiet steps, moving slowly forward. Expecting an ambush, she was surprised to find none - she had arrived at a doorway, which seemed to lead into an empty room.

Slowly, she took a single step forward, ready to dodge any ambush or trap. Nothing. She took another - still the room was still and silent. She took two more, then moved forward to the center of the room, still suspicious. Suddenly, her blood ran cold. A chilling voice filled the room, seeming to suck hope and warmth out of her body.

Hello, Mia.

Don't you just love cliffhangers?
:: shouts of protest are heard from the angry mob::

Heh, well, gotta go! Review!

***Chapter 20*: Voices**

I'm back!

Ivan: :: dragging Mia into the room behind him:: Here she is, Mia.

Um... hi? Why are you two here?

Ivan: :: ignoring the authoress:: I think she's sick. Take a look, okay?

And why would I be sick, pray tell?

Ivan: You're posting two updates within a month of each other! That's not normal!

Ha ha. Anyway, let's get on with the... story...

:: Mia approaches with a huge needle::

:: backing away:: Really, Mia, I'm fine... Mia... MIA!!! :: runs away::

Mia and Ivan: :: chasing after the authoress:: GET BACK HERE!

Mia slowly backed away from the voice - or what she hoped was away. It seemed to come from all around her at once.

Don't worry, Mia. Come back.....

Slowly, Mia's feet obeyed, not waiting from a command from her mind. She desperately tried to fight the black cloud that was slowly engulfing her senses. She was failing. Faster now she moved back toward the center of the room.

That's it. Closer.....

Mia reached the center of the room, and her feet stopped moving. She came back to her senses, and tried to clear her head of the murkiness that was filling it. "Who are you?" she said into the darkness, voice unfaltering. She had to fight it...

Never mind that. Come, Mia, there's plenty of time to chat. Stay...

Mia's feet, which had been cautiously starting moving away toward the far wall, stopped. She squeezed her eyes shut and tried to force her body to obey, but slowly her feet turned around, taking her back toward the center of the voice's power. Each step was agony to Mia's mind, as she tried to fight the dark force.

She tried reasoning with it. "I can't stay," she protested feebly, "I've got to finish this test... and help... my friends..." Even her voice struggled to be free of her command.

The voice laughed, a cold, harsh sound. *Do you really think that you'll make it out of here alive? That they'll make it out alive? Nonsense, child, they won't survive. They're probably dead already.*

"No..." Mia whispered, straining to maintain control. Denial, that was the key. Don't believe it... don't even consider what it's telling you...

Oh, yes, Mia, it's true. Think about it. Isaac has so much already on his mind and conscience; this will be too much. Ivan, he's too small, and... physically lacking. Once his Psyenergy runs out, he'll be gone. Garet...

Mia clamped her hands over her ears as the voice droned on, cutting through her soul, chilling her to the bone. Still the voice rang through her mind, pointing out all the faults of her friends, the different ways they would fall.

And you, Mia, you'll make it out... all your friends will be dead... they'll be dead...

Mia whimpered, feeling her mind succumbing to the voice, hanging onto its words. She was losing control...

You'll be all alone. You'll have no one to turn to. The voice paused. But there is a way you could escape your fate...

Mia felt herself slipping, as the voice took over her mind. Now she heard another voice responding. "How?" She realized it was her own.

Ah, Mia, it will be so easy... your life will be misery for you now... all you have to do... is end it.

She knew she was about to lose control. The dark haze enveloped her mind completely. Vaguely she wondered why she hadn't thought of suicide before.

Something materialized in Mia's hands - a sword. She smiled blankly. It would be so easy now... so easy...

Go on, Mia... end it... escape...

Slowly Mia brought the sword up in front of her chest, blade tip toward herself. The edge glinted with light, despite the

fact that the chamber she stood in was completely dark now. She closed her eyes and prepared to end her life...

Suddenly a clamorous sound erupted in her mind - squeals and shrieks. Mild annoyance entered Mia's clouded mind. Who was interrupting her? Slowly she opened her eyes...

She drew in her breath. Her Djinn! What was she doing? Silently she thanked them, dropping the sword to the ground.

She looked down, only to find the sword still in her hands.

You're being difficult, are you? The voice took on a more angered, more chilling tone. *Do it! Now! End it all! END IT!*

Mia groaned as she tried to resist the force in her mind. The blade trembled in front of her chest, point brushing the fabric of her dress. Sweat formed on her forehead as a battle raged inside her head. Her Djinn squeaked and squealed, trying their hardest to drive the evil out of their mistress' mind.

The blade drew closer to her skin... closer... Against her will, Mia's hands began to slowly apply pressure, until a drop of blood trickled down the front of her bodice...

Suddenly a cry echoed through the chamber. Mia gasped. She knew the voice of her leader anywhere. That was Isaac's voice! Her mind wrenched out of the voice's grasp temporarily, thoughts began to race in her head. That didn't sound like a cry of pain... it sounded like... sorrow?

There was a clatter of metal as the sword dropped to the ground, truly dropped this time. Isaac was alive. And if one of her friends was alive, she had to keep going. It had all

been lies. Her face set in determination, she began to head away from the center of the room, searching for a door.

Where are you going? Get back here!

Mia didn't even hesitate. She felt like dancing for joy. Isaac was alive - her other friends probably were, too. She wasn't alone after all. She felt the last of the shadow leave her mind as the voice cried out, hissing and shrieking in agony.

The room lit up with torchlight. Mia breathed a sigh of relief - the voice was gone, she was free and in control. Spotting a door on the far wall of the chamber, she walked briskly toward it. She was ready for her next challenge - she could face anything.

There. I'm not sure if that's too short... but it was a good place to leave off. Besides, I'm tired...

Review!

***Chapter 21*: Mother**

I'm back... I know, I know, it took me an absurdly long time to update again. But rather than listing my excuses, let's just get right to the story. The story based on the game that I *don't own*...

Just a reminder - this story *does not* follow the plot of the actual GS (TLA). This is almost definitely not what we're going to find out in TLA. So don't correct me, please...

Fingering his staff, Ivan padded into the semi-darkness of the tunnel before him. There was almost no change in the appearance of the cave and its maze-like passages, but the young Jupiter Adept was uneasy. Something had changed... he was alone, but that wasn't what he felt...

He clutched the Zodiac Wand tighter in his hand, senses alert. Stopping where he was, he stood still in the darkness, violet eyes darting from side to side. There was definitely something else present. It was more of an energy source than an actual someone, but it was still unnerving.

Suddenly he was aware of an open space in front of him. A rush of cold air blew past Ivan, pushing his disordered blond hair away from his neck and sending chills down his spine. That wasn't natural wind...

As Ivan stepped quietly forward into the room, a sharp, throbbing pain shot through his temples. He staggered slightly, clutching his head and biting his lip to keep from crying out. A picture flashed in front of his eyes, so quickly that all he could identify was fire, bright and burning. The

pain faded slightly, but soon returned worse than before. Ivan gasped, bringing both hands up to his head. His weapon clattered to the floor, forgotten.

The same image appeared in his vision - fire everywhere, buildings burning... It seemed like some sort of a town or village, but everything was hazy, unclear. Suddenly he felt a strange sensation, almost as if something was being wrenched from the back of his mind. The picture sharpened, and he was aware of intense heat, and the smell of burning wood stinging his nose. His viewpoint seemed to be from quite low, almost on the ground, inside the frame of a burned house. He could hardly think through the terror that was steadily engulfing him. This seemed strangely familiar, and the feeling was frightening.

There was noise everywhere, the crackle of fire, screams of people in the streets. There were many figures in his vision - some were fleeing, while others seemed to be the cause of the chaos - but the only one he could clearly make out was a blonde, maybe in her late twenties. Her long hair was tangled and messy, and her clothes were scorched and torn. Ivan could tell she was exhausted, maybe injured, by the way she moved, the way she breathed in ragged gasps. She was making her way frantically through the crowd, as if searching for something. As she got nearer, Ivan could see her face - she had gentle features and a pair of large violet eyes.

If Ivan had been in control of his body, he would have gasped. He remembered that face, knew that face. The forbidden word that he hadn't used in so long flashed through his mind.

Mother.

Ivan felt like crying, screaming, and laughing all at once. That was his mother standing in front of him. His *mother*. Suddenly a pair of hands was reaching up in front of his vision, toward his mother. They were tiny, a baby's hands. *His* hands. Slowly, he started to remember. Dread filled him as he realized what would come next.

His mother caught sight of her baby and rushed towards him, tears streaming down her already tear-streaked face. Just as she reached him and was bending down, two people, two of the ones who had been setting fire to the town, ran up; a girl and a boy. They were dressed oddly, were smiling wickedly, and had strangely-colored skin.

His mother's eyes filled with fear, and she turned to face the newcomers. She stood directly in front of Ivan, shielding him from the strange Adepts. Ivan wanted to shut his eyes, to curl up in a corner and be free from this vision. But it was no use. He was forced to watch as his mother took a shaky step forward, a hand thrown to the sky. Shouting something, she threw her other hand up, then, glowing a blinding purple, brought both hands down toward the two figures. A huge ball of lightning, sparking and flashing, hurled down from the sky to crash onto the strange Adepts, shortly followed by a massive lightning bolt that lit up the whole village with its lavender glow. Then came a deafening crash of thunder, and all exploded into violet luster.

When his vision cleared, Ivan saw his mother lying face-down on the sooty ground. She wasn't moving. Suddenly, a creaking noise reached Ivan's ears. Panic filled him. The wall was collapsing! Slowly, it leaned over, tumbling down on Ivan's baby form. There was a numbing pain in his right arm, and his vision turned black. Soot and ashes filled his nose, mouth, and eyes. He couldn't breathe...

Ivan returned to consciousness, coughing violently. He still couldn't breathe, even though he knew he was back in the cave, in his own body. For a few more seconds, all he could do was lie on the cave floor coughing, tears streaming down his cheeks. When the coughing subsided, he still didn't rise. He simply lay on his back, wallowing in the memory of what he had seen - what he had remembered. After so many years of shutting the thought of her out of his mind, he couldn't comprehend the thoughts running through his head.

Finally, Ivan pulled himself off the floor. Shakily, he stood, trying to think of something logical to do. Tears pushed at his eyes, demanding to be let out, but Ivan refused. After a moment of thought, he raised his hands in front of him, whispering, "Reveal!"

Tuning his senses into the spell, Ivan examined the room which he stood in. It was fairly large, and through the Reveal spell, Ivan 'saw' an ethereal figure near a corner of the room. It appeared to be nothing more than a shadow, but he sensed a strange power emitting from it. This must have been what had caused his vision to be unearthed from his memory. As he stared at it more closely, the pain he had felt earlier returned, and a fresh wave of memory washed over him, bringing back the fire, the death, the chaos, his mother, all too clearly. He shuddered, feeling real emotion for the first time since the vision. Gathering confidence, he raised a hand and fired a Storm Ray straight at the creature. It shrieked and writhed on the cave floor. Ivan fired again and again, fighting the fear that the creature was attempting to inflict upon him.

Only when it was completely gone did Ivan allow himself to cry.

Okay, just so you know, I finished this on the 23rd, but our internet connection was down, so I couldn't get it up. Sorry! :(Also, I was on vacation for a week, so if I usually review your story and didn't, that's probably why.

Okay, please review!